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AT HOME IN THE WAR

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AT HOME IN THE WAR

BY

G. S. STREET

AUTHOR OF "THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BOY," "THE
TRIALS OF THE BANTOCKS," "THE GHOSTS OF
PICCADILLY," "PEOPLE AND
QUESTIONS," ETC.



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NOTE

THE earliest of these papers were written in the spring of 1917, the latest in the summer of 1918. I have not thought it advisable to amplify or modify in the light of facts more recent than the time of writing. Nearly all the papers have been published, in English or translated, abroad; ten of them at home in the *New Witness*, one in the *Times*, one in the *National Review*.

G. S. S.

Genl. Rev. Roy. Sept. '51. H. Young. 7/13/51 H. Young

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I

THE FIRST EMOTIONS

IT will be, I think, of some slight service to any one who proposes to read these notes of mine, if I trouble him with a few lines, but only a few lines, of personal explanation, giving him an idea of the opportunities I have had of writing what may be worth his reading. I have been unhappy, since the war began, in having all too much leisure for observation—at home, since there was nothing to take me abroad. The work of an official post I occupy was much decreased by the war, and there has been little “war work” available for me; for a year or so I was a special constable, but an affliction of the eyes caused me to be ordered, very decisively, to give up even that. And all this time—I may as well complete and have done with this egotistical excursion—I have had an itch to write something, natural to one whose profession or trade was writing for over twenty years. I felt, however, that quite

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enough was being written about the war, for whatever good reasons, by irrelevant people who had nothing special to say about it. (As for writing about anything else I found it impossible, and thanked Heaven that I was no longer compelled to do it for my bread.) It has been suggested to me now that it need not be useless if I record my impressions, not of the conduct of the war abroad or here, but of the changing emotions, frames of mind and general attitudes of my fellow-countrymen at home, with certain other matters on which I may have something to say, and I am only too ready to try. So . . . As for my opportunities, they are those of a middle-aged man fortunate enough to know many representative men, and men of great intelligence, of one also who happens to have friends in various sets or strata of our society. I am not attempting anything original, but the subject is wide enough to be viewed profitably from many different angles, and mine is probably not quite the same as another's. I shall be quite frank, without any idea of making this or that impression favourable to my countrymen. They can afford the truth.

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I go back to those days of excitement and bewilderment just before we declared war on Germany. I say bewilderment. It is the fashion to speak now as though all good Englishmen, all Englishmen but a few cranks and semi-traitors, had made up their minds, from the moment of Germany's intentions against France being clear, that England must fight or be dishonoured for ever. It was not so. Many of us, as good Englishmen as others, refused to accept what should be the honour or dishonour of our country from writers in newspapers, and required to know from our responsible statesmen what were our engagements. We were told them by Sir Edward Grey on the most memorable of Bank Holidays, and from that moment the course of honour was plain, but until that moment there was doubt in the minds of many who now forget it. Many of them also knew, perhaps as well as their more assured friends, that in all probability we were committed, and that in any case we could not stand by and see another defeat of France, but must follow sympathy with deeds : only in this tremendous matter we declined the leadership of journalists. The

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professed occasion of the war caused bewilderment too. The German leaders, who in other matters of diplomacy have shown nothing better than a rustic cunning, arranged this occasion with real cleverness : Austria's Archduke and her quarrel with Servia were so remote from us. Then there was the general surprise. No surprise to certain ardent writers who for many years had warned us incessantly of the coming onslaught of Germany ; no surprise, we learned later, to certain politicians who had done no such thing. I know not if posterity will see wisdom in the excuse of those latter, that to warn would have been to provoke what they thought was after all not inevitable, or if posterity will indict the leaders of Western civilization generally for not having faced this menace to it while it was less strong. But it is certain that surprise was general among Englishmen in 1914. Even some of us who were attentive to Mr. Maxse and his Review had begun to doubt if he was right. For myself I own freely that, having looked under my bed, so to speak, for a German, as old ladies are said to look for a burglar, for ten years or so before 1911, when

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in that year Germany came to the edge of war and refrained, I began to think that those who told us of peaceable Germans getting their way might be right after all. I am certain that even when the war was a fact, very few of us indeed realized that we had to deal not with a Kaiser and a militarist party dragging an unwilling people after them, but with a nation moulded and formed for the enterprise and regimented to a wild enthusiasm.

So in the days before we declared war there was a general bewilderment and some doubt. But the Foreign Secretary made his speech on August 3, and at the end of the next day we were at war; England was in it, and all that remained was to go through it with all our might. That was sure, but it is folly to suppose that we were all attuned in mind and soul to the greatness of what had befallen us. Neither the tremendous issue nor the tremendous task was at once apparent. We had not the advantage of the Americans, who went to war with full knowledge of what the end thereof means and of what manner of beings are the Germans. It is not wonderful that there was at first much folly and too

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little gravity in the air. The foolish boys and girls who waved their hats and shouted before Buckingham Palace had their counterpart among the people who might have known better. There was in some quarters a petty and personal pessimism. A few people were in panic about food and laid in absurd stores—only a few and it was the newspapers which made them prominent—and others drew out bank balances in gold. There was, on the other hand, a much too facile optimism. Hasty men in clubs (I was one of them) began to rearrange the map of Europe as soon as the Germans were checked before Liège. A better optimism was to come later; this early “it’s all right” spirit is sad in retrospect. Another phase of this time is also strange to remember: we were positively sorry for the German people and regretted the necessity we should be under of destroying a great many of them. Considering the pre-war unpopularity of the Germans everywhere, their arrogance and indifference to other people’s feelings, I think this feeling was really magnanimous. “It’s all Kaiser Bill,” said a man on a bus to me, and the “Bill” was half friendly; “the German

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people don't want it, poor devils ! ” And a lady told me that her horror of the war was lessened by the knowledge that we should fight “ without passion.” “ Poor devils ! ” “ Without passion ! ” In those early days, too, all of us but the baser sort were anxious that the Germans in our country should be as comfortable as possible in their unfortunate position. We were for fighting the tiger with the rules we had used of old when we fought with men. A short round—Six weeks ?—Six months ? How many really believed Lord Kitchener ?—and friends again.

These earliest attitudes and expectations were evanescent indeed, perhaps hardly worth recording. So soon came the German beastliness in Belgium and we began to know what men we were fighting ; so soon spread the knowledge of Bernhardt and his like, and we began to know what ideas and what ambitions were against us. The retreat from Mons and the flower of our small army dead, the call on our young manhood and on the courage and steadfastness of a million homes—these followed soon indeed, and all levity and optimism of the thoughtless sort died down, at least in the most of us,

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and we began to envisage something of the task, and personal sorrow and pity grew and grew among us. The easy optimism went, and the true optimism, which told us that whatever the German progress now, if we stood firm we should win, took its place. That before the Marne; a flash of the first cock-sureness reappeared when it was fought—were they not on the run?—but went quickly as the Aisne dragged on and we began to settle to the long prospect. I come to later and stronger emotions.

II

THE GREAT RESPONSE

IN my last chapter, seeking to be frank and fair, I stated that the war, coming upon most of us as a surprise, did not always evoke emotions equal to the tremendous occasion. In this one, in which I propose to write about the response, and more particularly the immediate response, as I saw it, which the country made to the call upon it, I need to hamper myself with little indeed of qualification. That the whole population understood at once what was at issue, and what it ought to do, and proceeded to do it, no one would assert or believe ; it would be unbelievable of any country, at any time. Let that be granted, and then let there stand out, unshadowed, what in my heart I believe to be one of the few most glorious events in the history of a country which is not without glorious memories. I speak of the response made at once when Lord Kitchener called, first for half a million men, then for a million,

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and so on, in the first weeks and months of the war.

Let us consider what was asked of our young men. It was not true, as our enemies believed, and as some of ourselves half feared, that ease and frivolous interests had made them soft, but it was true that the great majority of them had minds utterly unattuned to the thought of war. It was fourteen years since our war in South Africa, and though that had left a permanent mark on the officers of our army in a greater zeal and study in their profession, to most of the young men now asked to volunteer it was hardly even a memory. They had no thought of war as a possibility in their lives and no preparation for it. How great the difference that fact must have made in their minds as compared with our enemies and our allies who had had national military service for fifty years may be illustrated by the minor trial of the duel. Every one acknowledges that whereas in a country practising the duel, the man of average courage, having known all his life that some untoward accident might involve him in one at any time, can face it when it happens to him with

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little disturbance, a far greater effort is called for in the citizen of a country where the duel does not exist, who is called upon to fight one abroad. No such demand, in this respect, has been made on others as was made on my young fellow-countrymen in 1914. It is not made on Americans, who have faced the possibility now for a long time.

There is something else to consider if you would judge truly this response. At home, as we all believed, there was no danger at all: they would leave safety behind them. But after Mons we believed that those who went out, certainly those who went first, would face far more than the average chances of death and wounds in warfare. They would face an overwhelming superiority of numbers and of equipment in artillery. Soldiers, I need not say, take the hazard of great odds against survival cheerfully as a matter of course. I remember that when a certain battalion went out later in 1914, not an officer expected to live; hardly one is alive. To take that chance cheerfully is a thing of course with the soldier. But our young men who obeyed Lord Kitchener's call were not soldiers, and though it is true

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that by the time they were trained to go out the prospect was less terrible than it had been, at the time when they came forward it was as I have said.

Yet they came without hesitation to face a hell which had suddenly opened before the dazed eyes of a happy world. They came knowing little of international causes and policies and with no traditional impulse of enmity. They came simply because their country was at war and needed them. I say they have given merely by that act, and not counting what they were afterwards to accomplish, a new, great glory to a country not lacking in glory.

In a warlike but not a military nation, as it has been truly said the English are, the warlike spirit is slow to rise. It has risen now, and our armies will fight till the enemy is beaten : no doubt whatever. In the first rush, however, while there were thousands of boys and young men whom the chance of excitement and adventure delighted, and would have sent out in a far less compelling cause, there were many more to whom the business was anything but congenial, who went solely as a duty.

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It could not have been otherwise. A few elderly people may still wave their pens in their peaceful studies to the splendour of war : the rest of the world knows now that it is hell. I think that those young men who thought then it was hell and saw no allure-ment in it and yet went at once have the greater honour. I think for a moment of one known to me. He was a very young man, greatly loved by his friends, in whose life had been no discipline whatever, no work, and some waywardness. He hated restraint and order beyond all things. He joined at once, seeing no other course open to him, and made a popular and useful officer, but it was no secret to his friends that the life pleased him no better than he had expected. He went out and was killed in a desperate effort to bring in a wounded soldier. Peace, doubly, to the ashes of such a one.

Well, they came from all sorts and conditions. More largely in proportion, at first, from the better informed and well-to-do : it would have been shame to them had it been otherwise, if only because it was, as a rule, easier for them to do so without hurt to those they supported. In many cases,

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however, it meant more in this regard than with poorer men. There were young professional men making good incomes, which they sacrificed and so left, if they fell, wives and children to poverty—that chance of poverty weighing little with the wives in the total of sacrifice. Naturally with such the response was a little slower, until the need was clearly seen. But the young untrammelled men among people known to me came with scarcely an exception—with no exception but those caused by ill-health or Government authority. I remember, early in 1915, being told by a friend, a member of a large family, that in sons and nephews he had thirty kinsmen serving. And so it went on, until you came to the unenlightened and outlying, for whom the country, none too soon, prescribed compulsion. If the picture was dimmed for some eyes, it is because exceptions stand out, and some papers shouted about “slackers” and some idle women went about with white feathers. (One was given to an officer wounded at Mons and decorated, who happened to be in mufti; another, to his joy, to a friend of mine aged sixty.) But for my eyes, at least,

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this response of our manhood was not dimmed at all.

I speak next of the response of young and capable women who came forward for hospital work, and, later on, for Government work of all kinds. They came first, no doubt, because their country was at war and because their husbands and brothers were going to fight, but the effectiveness of the response was very greatly aided by the saner side of the much-abused feminist movement in this country. Mr. Wells has drawn an apt distinction between those who were in that movement out of the hysterical assertiveness of sex, and those who simply claimed reasonable activities of life independent of their sex. These latter, themselves personally, and still more the spirit and habit of self-reliance they had helped to create and foster in thousands of their sisters outside the "movement," were of inestimable service. This picture is not to be dimmed for any eyes but those of fools by a few vagaries or insincerities. The outward expression of the spirit has been one to fill the heart with pride and gratitude—the troops of young women, in uniform or out of it, one sees busy on the

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great work, bright-eyed, intelligent, unself-conscious, and if I may say it—and why the devil should I not?—comelier than ever they were before.

As for the other side of women's work in this war, the brave, uncomplaining endurance of sorrow, the sane, calm endurance of anxiety, it is not for such a pen as mine. I do not know if it is for any pen. Its tribute is reverence and silence—the silence itself preserves.

There is one element in the response, insignificant by comparison, of which just a word may be said. I refer to the over-aged buffers, like myself, who were out of the main business. Some of them, stronger and younger than the average of their age, were given commissions; others in like cases dissimulated their age and managed to enlist; all honour to them. The rest of us were a little pathetic—so anxious and so unable to help. The business of the country had to go forward somehow, and men with only part of their time to offer were not wanted. The keener and fitter drilled and dug trenches, and made themselves ready if they were wanted. Others, like myself,

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became amateur policemen. It was not a very active task I had to perform, but merely to be inconvenienced—as when one was up all night—was something. It took a little from the shame of being alive at all. For that is the sting to us older men and perhaps the worst evil of hellish war—that it reverses the rule of nature by which the old go first.

III

THE CHANGE OF VALUES

IN a war which has lasted for over three years a certain habit of war is of necessity established. The human mind, like the human body, is of all things adaptable to circumstance. It grows in a measure accustomed both to the report of the terrific clashes on the fronts and their ghastly results to the beings involved in them, and to the sight and more intimate knowledge of the counterpart of these things at home, the multitude of men in uniform, the women engaged in war work, the dislocation of common life, even the daily toll of loss and sorrow. The imagination, enlarged by greater knowledge of fighting, operations and details, is at the same time less stimulated by strangeness and horror. It is to be remembered also of England that near as the war is to us, it is not on our soil. Some people have written as though they resented, even vehemently, that the mind of London, for example, was

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not concentrated on the daily fighting to the extent that the mind of Paris must be. But it was merely silly to expect Londoners to behave as though there were a German army at Oxford. It was to confuse sentiment and fact like impatient children. There was no German army at Oxford and it would have been both foolish and damaging for Londoners to simulate a strain which did not exist. Is there even the same concentration on the war in the South of France as there is in Paris? Unless I am altogether misinformed by those who ought to know, there is certainly—and inevitably—not.

These considerations point to the fact, as I think it is, that as the war has lengthened out there has been some re-establishment of the spirit of normal life, shaken and dislocated though that is. Some personalities, quite forgotten, begin again to cast a slight shadow on us, and so forth. But this really does but throw into relief and make more certain the great changes of values which persist, and are likely to persist long after the war is over.

The greatest of these, if I am right, is a spiritual change, and concerns the greatest

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of all human matters, life and death. I do not mean—it is very far from being true—that the enormity and unspeakable gravity for the nation of our losses in battle, nearly all of young and promising lives, are the less felt by us day by day, as the tale of them lengthens, or that we are less vividly conscious of the sorrow brought by the Angel of Death into ever new circles. But in regard to our *own* life or death, we at home must feel that the question is not what it was. Consider the case of a man of middle age but still in the prime of life, more or less, who, before the war, should have been told by the doctors that he had only a few weeks, or a few days, to live. If he was a man of average courage and with a right sense of manners, he would have told the fact to those who had to know it calmly, without a fuss, but he would have felt, none the less, that it was a fact of considerable importance: he would have felt, inside himself, very seriously moved. It would not be so now. In the face of the thousands of younger lives given for the freedom of his country, and incidentally for his own, he would be ashamed, not only to admit perturbation to his friends,

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but to feel it at all. He might do so, for it is a human thing, but he would turn from the feeling as hopelessly unworthy. His own death—that of a man too old and unfit for fighting—surely the most insignificant thing in the world! And that sense of insignificance cannot but be extended, in a measure, and apart from any real personal sorrow—which, alas! as the years go by us is less easily evoked—to the deaths of our contemporary acquaintances. This is not hardness. It is simply the realization of a strange perspective forced on us by strange and terrible events.

Going closely with this change is a sense of uncertainty in all our lives. The illusion of stability in health, or place in the world, or the significance of our friends, or our circumstances and environment generally, is fading. Our lives seem, in a measure, uncertain as are those of our friends at the Front, and so does everything else, and the uncertainty is accepted with equanimity. For my part I never think now as I felt unconsciously before the war, that anything arranged will of necessity come off. Anything may happen! One may be—though

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it is unlikely—destroyed by a bomb in the night. Taxation may leave one without money for food, or there may be no food. Anything may happen and nothing (in our individual lives) matters much, and everything must be accepted lightly. The moments of intimate happiness, even those of mere social pleasures, are the sweeter for the uncertainty. For God's sake let us take them while we may, and not spoil them with intrusive thoughts of a future so dubious. It is an addition of practical philosophy.

Another spiritual change is in the importance and precedence of the virtues. I will not labour the obvious pre-eminence of the courage and coolness and gay endurance of the fighting man. Those are obviously the virtues most important for our world now, and are seen as such because there is grievous occasion for them. Precisely the same qualities, though valuable enough in peace, are not then so all-important, and if the world of men is to go on at all their pre-eminence cannot always continue. It is obvious now, but I would speak of virtues as they operate at home, more obscurely. In this matter I speak with certainty only of myself, but I

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think there must be many like me. All my life, hitherto, while I have admired the sterner virtues, patience, strong will and purpose, enduring effort, grit, as every sane man must admire them, I have placed certain other virtues much higher in my private hierarchy—kindness, sympathy, generosity. Now I am less sure. I see, in an importance lit up by events, the sterner virtues operating; I see men and women I know, working all day long, sparing themselves in nothing for my country, and whole-heartedly I admire them. Every quality has its defect and that of the sterner virtues is apt to be a certain hardness and an intolerance of feebler wills and feebler efforts. That defect, which I used to hate, I now accept gladly enough and even doubt if a defect it be—unselfishly, if I may say so, for with fifty unfruitful years behind me I am not unlikely to suffer by it, even though now I should do my best. I think many must have changed like me. In any case we shall be a less easygoing people than we were in the coming years, and the sterner virtues will hold the field.

Besides these broader changes of value are those lighter and more temporary changes

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in our perspective of callings and persons. Popular actors and popular authors, for example: they are still popular, but who gives them anything like the importance in our society they had generally before? These changes were naturally not perceived all at once by the people concerned. I remember, with a certain sense of pathos, how, in the early weeks of the war, a number of writers with names then much before the public, popular novelists and the like, brought out a solemn manifesto to assure the world that they approved of their country's being loyal to its word. Poor dears! how odd that sense of proportion must seem to them now.

Such light changes as these are of the sort which tend, even now, to change back again to something like normality, as I said in the beginning. But the larger—the spiritual—grow deeper and broader and so, I think, will continue. It is possible—but may any gods there be prevent it!—that the peace will be only one which will leave the nations still compelled to waste their powers of well-being in the stupidity of armaments and preparations, and then danger and stress

THE CHANGE OF VALUES

will keep us as we are growing to be. But even in a happier and more careless future none of us who are seeing and feeling now will lose those spiritual changes altogether. We shall reverence the solid virtues in others which will have pulled us through, and we shall count our personal lives a gift to be given back with a shrug.

IV

THE MIXING OF CLASSES

ALL through the war we have heard a good deal, at home, of the confusion of social classes, of the clerk being the superior officer of his employer, of the squire taking orders from his gardener, and so forth. Several plays have introduced examples of this change and one or two made it their main theme. It is, no doubt, a very trivial matter in comparison with the greater issues of the war, but it is not uninteresting, and since it arises, it is worth an attempt at a correct estimate.

The significance of any change there has been depends upon a true knowledge of the business of class distinctions as they were just before the war. They were commonly much exaggerated in novels and plays from which, more or less unconsciously, so many people get most of what they believe to be their knowledge of life. Novels and plays, especially plays, are apt to exaggerate every-

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thing, and are apt, also, to take *their* knowledge of life from older plays and novels. In the matter of classes, and the attendant snobbishness of them, we hark back to Thackeray, the great teacher on the subject. He is the most accurate observer in all English literature, but our world has changed enormously since his day. It is true that we are not socially, as yet, a really democratic people. Servants do not often join in the conversation at dinner, as I was told was frequently the case in pre-revolution Russia. But the *de-haut-en-bas* attitude has long disappeared, except on the stage, from people with any claim to good breeding. We are altogether more human and kindly. It is true to say that among people of real intelligence and capacity, people who count for anything in the world of brains and movement, the question of class never arises at all. It is not that they accept the man of fine qualities and humble origin as an equal in spite of his birth and early environment; they simply do not think of these early irrelevancies at all. This attitude spreads, at least outwardly, for the snobbishness natural to all humanity, save the

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elect, is very much corrected by the fear of its name. We are vastly changed in the last fifty years.

Of course there are qualifications. A sense of family, a certain pleasure in being of an old one, is in my opinion a natural extension of the ego, rather beneficent than otherwise ; it should not be confused with a sense of class, with which it has nothing to do, but it is very apt to be so confused and to look very like it. So does what is not a sense of class but the effect of associations. A may prefer the society of B, who is of his social class, to that of C, who is not of it, not from any sense of class, but because A and B, having been brought up in the same way, have similar interests and habits ; C, however, may very likely think that A is merely a snob. These are appearances. The qualification in reality which is most important—I say it with a slight trepidation—is found among women. Even among finely bred people where a man would be vexed beyond measure if he thought he had shown any recognition of a lower class in talking to another, his wife might show a wholly unconscious air of exclusiveness or

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patronage. The reason is that the man has experienced the rough and tumble of school and college, where unmerciful chaff would have attended any superiority, and his lady has not. After all, it does not matter. No masculine man minds being patronized by a woman.

One thing must be remembered. I have been thinking rather of what are called the upper classes and their relations to others. But really operating distinctions of class are found much more, and in a far more bitter degree, in the lower strata. The small tradesman's sense of class in regard to the manual worker is quite definite and not easily modified. The foreman's wife has commonly strong views about her social equality with the operative's. These distinctions are far more real, and imply far more emotion, and far more affect the comfort of life than any obtaining between dukes and solicitors.

We come back to the war. It is really these last-mentioned distinctions only that must have been turned topsy-turvy in the war to any great extent. And they would have meant the most—if any meant any-

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thing at all. For my part, I do not believe that any fighting man ever gives a thought to such irrelevant nonsense as previous position, compared with the present. But if any did, I would wager, for example, that a butler would give more thought to having to salute the under-gardener than would his master. As a matter of fact, they would be three good fellows undergoing together a hard and dreadful experience in regard to which social position is as important as a flea is to an elephant.

These, however, are not the distinctions people mean, or plays exhibit, when they speak of the mixing of classes in the war. They think of the upper classes and of the squire being subordinate to the footman, and all that. Granted the fact, the strangeness is exaggerated because of the exaggerations about distinction of class before the war on which I have commented. I saw, for example, an amusing and delightfully acted play at the Haymarket, in which much was made of the revulsion of attitude towards a tailor on the part of the local baronet when the tailor became a colonel and the baronet a private in a volunteer corps. But the

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original attitude to the tailor was that of the people in Meredith's "Evan Harrington," and "Evan Harrington" was written fifty years ago.

I think, however, that the fact as well as the strangeness is exaggerated. Of course, in a war of millions, very many men of so-called humble position have shown themselves worthy of commissions, and have been pushed by their merit into higher and higher grades. We should be indeed in a hopeless way were it otherwise. The same thing surprises nobody in civil life. It is the counterpart which I doubt; if many men of what is technically the class of gentlemen, having joined as privates, have remained privates.

No one less than I is inclined to overrate our Public Schools in ordinary life, but in training for regimental officers it is absurd to deny their extreme value. Given equality of physical powers and courage, it is obvious that the man who has had the training in discipline of a Public School, in first being a fag and then with fags under him, must have a great advantage in the management and leading of the men over one who has not.

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The thing has been proved. It was judged that the Public Schools Corps and the Artists' Rifles—of the same sort of material—were wasted as privates and all were given commissions.

No ; it is not occasional reversals in position that make the significance of the mixing of classes in the war. It is a much more important thing, the good comradeship and mutual respect of men of various origins serving together. That is obvious in our armies. But it is working also among even larger numbers of men at home. There is the sympathy and admiration we, at home, feel for those who come back to us ; there is the sympathy in which men of all sorts work together. At least as important—in this matter of class—is the mixing of women, because, as I hinted, they are more conservative in it. In hospitals, Government offices and elsewhere, women of all classes have been working together as never before. And men and women together, of all sorts, wherever they meet, are drawn together as they talk of the experiences and chances of the war.

The great matter is the intenser feeling of

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a common country, in which I include, of course, subjects of the King whose actual homes are thousands of miles away : England is their country too, as any one can know who talks with them. Men and women feel a love of country who never felt it before. It is not exclusive ; our Allies, who are feeling the same emotion, will understand it in us, as we in them. But the emotion is for ourselves. Our fields and trees and inheritance and traditions and famous men—all are doubly dear now, and so are we to one another. Classes ! who thinks of classes ?

V

OUR VIEWS OF GERMANS

IN an earlier chapter I noticed the popular feeling about the Germans at the very beginning of the war, how we took our traditionally good-humoured view of them and were sorry for them as for people unwillingly hustled into war by their autocracy. Our ignorance about them was indeed extreme. I can hardly recall a single English writer, except Mr. Austin Harrison, who, having lived in contemporary Germany, had given us a faithful picture of its brutality and depravity. Germans in England had been on their guard and had tried to dissimulate their arrogance and conceit, though not so successfully as to avoid considerable unpopularity. Some of us had read Nietzsche, but had no idea how far the Germans, whom, like some other Germans of genius, he had despised and hated, had preposterously arrogated his doctrine of the superman to themselves, and supposed it gave them rights of

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rapine and outrage on the rest of the world. The sham-scientific rubbish of Herr Houston Chamberlain had had some vogue among the less acute reviewers, but its practical implications were not seen. Bernhardi was almost unknown among us before the war. We did not begin to understand that in Germany was an elaborate civilization utterly different from our own in aims, methods, and moral values, where the individual was entirely sacrificed to the State, and that not in its turn a system for ensuring individual happiness, but a huge engine of external plunder and murder, historically and spiritually based on the polity of the robber-baron of the Middle Ages. The field of our knowledge was camped over by elderly men, some of them eminent, who had studied in Germany in their youth and retained agreeable memories of the Germany of that period. They told us nothing of the foregoing but impressed on us an exaggerated opinion of German literature, philosophy, and science. (It is a universal foible of humanity to exaggerate the worth of what you know and another man does not know : the vanity of special knowledge is seen everywhere.) It

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was amusing to observe, when the war had started, how experts rushed forward to topple over this opinion, especially in regard to science, but at the outbreak of war it was firmly established. Then the idea of the God-fearing and firm but kindly German went back to Carlyle, and the same thinker was responsible for glossing German brutalities from Frederick's time to 1870.

For all these reasons, when first there arrived from Belgium news and eye-witnesses of atrocities which it would insult wild beasts to call bestial, there was bewilderment, and it is not surprising that some people refused to believe. The English temper is quick to fire at cruelty, and the evidence was clear : most of us were prompt enough in our horror and wrath. But some who seem to resent the report of what is hateful and terrible as a sort of personal affront, and some who clung to early memories of a better Germany, professed to disbelieve. They seized on the want of proof for certain charges—and of course all the charges were not proved—and they reminded us that unfounded charges were made against our troops in South Africa, the last argument having its roots in the

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superficial and ignorant persuasion that all men are alike and all events follow the same course : there having been no evidence in the one case they insisted there could be none in the other. Later, the evidence being too much for them, they insisted that these were the acts of battle-maddened soldiers out of their officers' control. In time, we all knew that the case was far worse ; that the acts were done in cold blood by the direction of officers, in some of whom there was a hideous strain of sadic perversity, and as a policy deliberately chosen by the German Government. We went on talking of savages, and of course the outrages could only be performed by men with a savage strain in them, but in truth they meant a much more important and significant thing : a civilization, that is, with alien standards deliberately using the ape and the tiger in man as a weapon. A harder matter to fight than sporadic savagery.

And now the methods of this civilization are plain to the blindest and most doubting. The names of the *Lusitania*, Nurse Cavell, and Captain Fryatt have branded it for ever, and the memory of thousands of malignant cruelties and mean spitefulnesses done on

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defenceless prisoners will preserve the nature of the people who made it and whom it suits. There are no doubters left. We see what we ought to have seen long ago: that the Prussian civilization, sharing neither in the Christian tradition nor the tradition of chivalry, must war with our own, and we know at last the nature of the Germans. What then, now, is our feeling about them?

I said in the beginning that I would be frank, and I confess that by no means do I see everywhere at home the only feeling which in my opinion would correspond to its object. With most of us, I believe, the feeling of disgust is so deep that we could not express it, so deep that idle threats and trivial gibes are offensive to it. On the other hand, there are here, of course, as everywhere, people too light-minded to feel deeply about the Germans or anything else. But there is a better reason for a comparative absence of deep feeling against the Germans which I have noticed in many places. It is the inveterate good nature of the English, a fine thing at its best but apt to degenerate to flabbiness. Memories are short, imagination is rare: some of those who have not actually seen

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the German work forget, and let a sportive good temper bubble up. Take the popular nickname, the "Huns." To my ear it lacks altogether the bitterness every Frenchman puts into "Boche." "Boche" means nothing in particular, but does express contempt and dislike. "Hun" has a meaning, to be sure, but it conveys little to the average user of it beyond a sort of vaguely comical belittling. To my mind "German" expresses something a great deal more hateful, and after the war I would give a substantial portion of a small income never to hear or use it again. I do not hear the Kaiser called "Bill" now, as in the beginning, and that perhaps is a sign of deeper feeling about him.

I would separate from the sort of good humour I deprecate at home that which obtains among our men at the Front. That, so far as I can gather, has had its ups and downs. Cruelties done on captives by Germans have goaded different regiments, at different periods of the war, into a fury which must have made the sparing of life a hard matter. But, as is known, the Germans have often fought bravely, and it is not in the

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nature of fighting Englishmen to let other feelings override respect for a brave enemy. A certain kindness must result. Then, too, they and the enemy are sharing an experience of ghastly strangeness and horror, are sharing it alone, cut off from the safe people behind them. There is a gulf between us at home and men with that experience, a gulf which no imagination can bridge, and it would be something more than impertinence to prate or dogmatize, or approve or disapprove, of any feeling of theirs reported to us. "Old Fritz" sounds friendly, but Fritz is there to be killed or to kill. If we were fighting with him at home respect might be a help to humanity.

Yet I believe that even so, on reflection and remembering certain things, we should keep our disgust and horror. Those feelings, which I believe to be right and which I should be ashamed not to have, are no pleasure. The Germans are putting up a magnificent fight: I wish it were a clean fight and that our able enemy were also a gallant one. Being what he is, how will our feelings about him last? How shall we feel a few years hence after the war? I often hear men

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prophecy, perhaps with a little conceit of cynicism, that a short time after the war Germans will come here freely and be doing a roaring trade with us. I will not start a disquisition on economics at the end of a chapter—or in any place for that matter—and commercial necessities may be this or that. But I am sure that those who talk in this way realize little of the feelings of their fellow-countrymen if they think that any but the most restricted personal intercourse between the Germans and us will be possible for a generation, if then. Think of what they have done. Think of what we have suffered. And since I am speaking of cynics, I will add that as well as all the undying personal sorrow there is the material havoc made in countless lives by this war. And this war, we shall not forget, was planned deliberately by the Germans in a spirit of simple greed, planned as men plan a burglary, and by their act solely has this misery without parallel come upon the world. Our attitude to Germans will not be easily changed.

VI

OUR INTELLECTUALS

THE name is used in widely different denotations, and one must define what one means by it. At one end of the scale it is applied rightly to people of genuinely intellectual powers, genuinely interested in the higher abstract achievements of the intellect. At the other end it is arrogated to themselves, or is used of one another, by people who pick up easily little scraps of ideas and affect to despise those who have not taken that slight trouble ; whose greatest accomplishment is a scrappy and incoherent philosophy founded on the misunderstanding of a few popular writers ; who may possess some perky cleverness, but whose leading characteristic is the absence of anything worth calling intellect at all. For a practical purpose and to comply in my use of the word to common speech, to denote the sort of people who are generally meant, I think it well to strike an average. I refer to a con-

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siderable number of people in whom both the elements I have mentioned are present in some degree, but who, to take the average specimens, apply an ordinary level of intelligence to abstract ideas, to theories of life, to the less vulgar order of books, and so forth, and do so more exclusively of common interests than their fellows. The practical distinction is that they do this self-consciously, and do not forget the superiority of their interests to those of "the herd." I trust that my meaning is now plain. If it be confused—the subject is a little wobbly—I can assure the reader that he knows it perfectly well.

We have, then, a sort of class, a fairly large class, comfortably labelled, and its attitude to public affairs generally comes to be considered. I speak of the times before the war. Of course it is absurd to suppose that the attitude was always the same. That most general among them was, so far as I could see, a complete indifference tinged with contempt. Politics bored them, and an interest in politics was vulgar. "Who is the Prime Minister?" "Do you really think it matters which side wins?" And

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so on. Naturally there went with this an entire neglect of public duties. They lived, or affected to live, in a world apart and it never occurred to them as odd that the other world gave them means to live at all. Sometimes the attitude rose or sank from indifference to hostility, to dislike and contempt for all popular feelings and interests. And in some extreme cases we had that strange emotion which amounts to positive hatred of England. I do not know how far this anti-national spirit exists in other countries; you find it recurring again and again in the history of our own. It is difficult to analyse. I fancy it comes in the main from a jealousy and dislike of the people who govern the country, which leads to a base hope that things will go wrong under their government—from that and a cheated self-importance. That sort of motive is indeed pretty obvious in the case of certain politicians, but these are seldom to be counted among the intellectuals. Among them it is very rare, thank God, but when it exists I think that is the explanation.

In our former wars this spirit has shown itself often, but one is able to credit better

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motives as well to those who favoured the enemy. In the Holland House circle, for example, which wished well to Napoleon, there was a genuine love for France and admiration of the French Revolution which was, if illogically, transferred to him. And among our "pro-Boers" there was an honest belief that our cause was unjust.

Now in this war a definite spirit of anti-patriotism has hardly appeared. For one thing, no Englishman in his senses could affect to approve of the purpose and methods of the enemy; and for another, none of us can be ignorant that defeat means ruin for our country and an end to any life for us worth living. Keeping to my subject and excluding a few base politicians and agitators, I can think of no name of any note at all to whom I should, if I were on my oath, be compelled to attach this perversity. I can come, therefore, to lighter oddities, which may amuse and not enrage us.

We must distinguish between the older and the younger intellectuals. One is not elderly or middle-aged for nothing. Habits of thought and attitudes of mind harden in the years and are not easily to be upset even by

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such a shattering storm as this. By this time, I dare say, no intellectual is out of tone with the rest of us, but at the beginning some undoubtedly were. I remember one who, on my admitting that the war prevented my taking any interest in something or other of importance in his eyes, impatiently shouted, "Oh, the war! I hate it, I hate it!" That was his leading emotion, surprise and disgust at being simply compelled to notice what went on in the world of active men. Poor fellow, he must have searched hard for somebody to put the war aside and listen to him, like Diogenes for the honest man. By now, perhaps, as other interests assert themselves a little, he is comforted, but I hope in the meantime he has acquired a fresh perspective. . . . A characteristic of a good many intellectuals, not congenial to the rest of us, is an attitude as of one superior to vulgar passions and capable, therefore, of a fine impartiality. Mingled with this is the conceit of cosmopolitanism and of the broad views it is alleged to promote. (I do not say that it never does so, but I do say that it is often parallel to the waiter's linguistic accom-

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plishments.) In this mood an intellectual, not less anxious, I doubt not, than the rest of us for the defeat of the enemy, will insist on expounding the German point of view, even, sometimes, in regard to the most horrible atrocities. I confess to finding this large-minded affectation a little less human than I can bear. Its irritation is certainly unprofitable at the moment. When a man has burnt down my house after murdering my wife and children, my business is to kill him or to bring him to justice, not to study some diseased system of ethics by which the criminal justifies himself. All this, however, tends to fade as the elder intellectuals, like the rest, have felt the war in their personal affections.

One turns with some relief, however, to the younger, who responded to the war with their brothers and it may be with more credit at first since they gave up more in doing so. They had a fine example in young men whom they could not but admire and wish to imitate. I have been writing of average, self-conscious intellectuals, not of real poets and scholars and men of science. But the others, naturally, take themselves

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to be of this company, and the fine lead must have weighed with them. I have heard it argued that such a young man as Rupert Brooke, a true poet with the promise of being a great one, should have been kept at home. The answer to that is, of course, that such a one as he would have refused to stay, or would have broken his heart if compelled to stay. But if one wanted another answer it might be that his going determined very many clever young men who, at least in the beginning, were disinclined, not from lack of courage, but from their private views about war or the value of their intellects. So with hundreds of young scholars and students in science. Their loss is precious but no one can call it vain. And the young intellectuals, with very few exceptions, "rolled up." Even the exceptions I would regard not without respect, for in their case conviction was mostly real, and it took some courage to defend it, but happily they were few. The affectations were not all put aside—no one but a prig in things military would wish that—but they were all subordinated. I have heard young men who had fought well say

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strange paradoxes about the war, paradoxes which would have shocked the patriots of the Press ; but what matter ? They had fought well. And there is a pathos of its own in mental conceits and funny young affectations being carried into the dreadful ordeal. A boy I met, having just left school and the University, had resolutely refused any calling but that of a philosopher. He did not profess to write books or otherwise express his philosophy : he would simply be a philosopher. He is a Flying Corps boy now and risks his life many times a day. . . . Yes, the young intellectuals give us few regrets indeed in this war of wars. I sometimes wonder—with apologies to my contemporaries—if the young intellectuals of the nineties, when I was a young man too and may have been counted among them, would have done as well as they. I hope so, but I think we were less free from the morbid side of intelligence, less active and wholesome, and therefore, less fit to face and go through the ordeal. Better for us now, or those of us who survived it, if it had come to us.

VII

POLITICS AND PAPERS

“**I**F we could only shoot all the politicians!” said A. “If we could only hang all the journalists!” said B, and A and B agreed that both massacres would conduce to our winning the war.

Probably the average politician or journalist would be surprised if he knew, as politeness prevents his knowing, how general, among a large section of his countrymen, and how vehement has been the professed desire for his extinction since the war began. People did not mean all they said, no doubt, but behind these petulant phrases was a good deal of real bitterness. It is far indeed from my mind to make a general attack either on politicians or journalists, among whom are very many men who have worked their hardest for their country in the face of grave and baffling difficulties. But the bitterness is worth explaining.

Some of the reasons are on the surface and

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some of them are unfair. General abuse of politicians, for example, on the ground of mistakes, or what seemed to be mistakes, is nearly always unfair at a time of such complications. The critics ignore difficulties or do not know of them. Downright and discreditable stupidity there must have been, because there always is in all human affairs on a large scale. A course pursued with unhappy results in one direction, however, has often been taken, inevitably, to avoid worse results in another, and the latter cannot be stated in public, and so on. A parallel injustice is done to journalists in regard to their unfortunate prophecies. Their readers wanted conjectures, and the poor men did their best with the facts and reasoning power at their disposal : in private we all of us have been making howlers in our prophecies. . . . Other reasons are merely partial. Party spirit is inveterate among us, and the old party feelings having gone (except to some extent among politicians themselves) they have been replaced by differences on policies at issue in the war. People also, naturally, if childishly, have imported feeling into their views as " optimists " and " pessi-

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mists" and regarded their opposites with impatience and dislike. These are objections to some journalists and politicians, not to all, but they have contributed to a general irritation.

Perhaps the most obvious cause of that on the surface as regards journalists is the perpetual lecturing and scolding to which numerous writers have subjected us. Many have shared the opinion which I hold strongly that in the early part of the war grave disservice was done to the country, and grave injury caused to it among our Allies, by the writers who constantly belittled its efforts and parroted their "when shall we realize that we are at war?" (That phrase became a common catchword and I have heard of its being used by an impatient shop assistant to a lady whose two sons had been killed.) They seemed to be furious, as it were, with those who did not share their nervous excitement but reflected our traditional freedom from panic, and they shouted fatuously for that to be done at once which could only be done after long preparation. With these there is some serious quarrel. But putting that phase aside I have noticed a sustained

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air of the scolding schoolmaster intelligibly irritating to the nerves. It would not be unnatural if some of us were in rather a touchy frame of mind, irresponsive to lectures. For the sake of the supreme crisis of the country, individual liberties have been given up to an extent undreamed of here for centuries. Our native dislike of all officials and our prompt resentment of their least encroachment have been suppressed. We have approached in some ways to a German system which we loathe and rightly believe to be infinitely inferior to our own—except for this purpose of fighting them. All that had to be done, but it has not left some of us in the mood to welcome the schoolmaster's airs. When, for example, a man is just keeping his head above water, with a much decreased income and much increased claims on it, without money or credit, it annoys him to be told by his newspaper that unless he invests in the War Loan he is an unpatriotic scoundrel. One is apt to wonder if the anonymous writer practises all he preaches.

An irritant against politicians has been frequently an appearance of preoccupation with trifles instead of with the war, and that,

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of course, has extended to journalists also. There is a good deal of injustice about this. Politicians and journalists have a certain amount of normal business outside the war, and have to attend to it, just as a solicitor or a doctor has to attend to his. I am bound to confess that there have been rather startling instances. On one occasion, for example, the House of Commons had a "scene" inflicted on it by one of its mountebanks, and an evening paper printed all the silly affair, with the mountebank's *ipsissima verba*, in large type—news interesting to the rest of us from Salonika being printed small. But that sort of thing is rare. Politicians, contrariwise, have marvelled that matters transacted by them, in normal times of absorbing interest, such as the electoral reform, have gone without a sign of excitement outside their House. The truth is that we who are not fighting or working solely for the war have our own various businesses thrust upon us, but outside them have no care for anything but the war and its consequences for the country and for individual men and women : how could it be otherwise ? Only, unlike politics, our businesses are not

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advertised in the papers : if they were, we might seem triflers to one another.

Underneath these surface reasons lies a far deeper one. It affects the attitude of many of us to politicians and journalists at all times, and has made it hostile in the war. By other men of education and thought, politicians and journalists, taken in the mass or the average, are regarded so far as their profession goes as men whose views and efforts are occupied with appearances and not with the realities of life. (I have happened on a distinction of Plato's, but, of course, my sense is that of common speech.) I can say that without any suspicion of conceit about myself, since my own working life, in the writing of books and so forth, has been engaged with appearances also. But soldiers, sailors, men of science, whether of theory or practice, men who manage industrial concerns, and the like, generally have this opinion of politicians as such. There is some injustice in it, no doubt, but it is not all unjust. It is a vice of democratic societies in which political power depends ultimately on popular favour, that those who seek it should not desire to do things but only to

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have the appearance of doing things. The only cure for this is popular intelligence. Meanwhile it is the price we pay for liberty, or if a gloomy reader prefers to say so, for the illusion of liberty—and the illusion is better than conscious servitude. How far we are really a democratic community may be disputed, but with all respect to certain contemporary observers we are certainly democratic enough for this vice to be fairly evident among our politicians, and for a similar reason it is evident in the newspapers also. It is, as I have suggested, the men who themselves are in close touch with reality and necessarily do things, who most dislike it. Now, this terrific war has multiplied these men. Men do things who dealt with appearances before, and men always at grips with reality have felt the clutch of it more closely. Consequently the dislike has multiplied also and has grown in strength. The most bitter comment on politicians and their ways I have heard came from a man who controlled a great practical enterprise involved in the war, and I have heard many from soldiers and workers of all kinds. "All for show" is the burden, and, of

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course, insincerity is the charge which accompanies it.

How far actual measures taken by politicians in the war and how far newspaper articles prompting them are justly saddled with this charge it is beyond me to argue. Certain minor measures at home do seem to me to have been advocated and done simply for show and with no practical effect. But I credit politicians and journalists also with doing what they could, in the main, for the country, and if a normal vice may come up now and then all sorts of men have their peculiar faults. It is my business to record only as an observer a feeling widely spread among men of ability and thoughtfulness. That, and to hope as an optimist that the faults they pillory will partly disappear in a new spirit of public life. One may always hope.

VIII

DISPROPORTION

TRULY to envisage the immensity of the issues at stake in this war surpasses all but the rarest of imaginations. We try to express it in words, but the words are like numbers when they run to billions; our minds do not follow them. We speak of Greeks and Persians, and, immeasurably greater though the scale of this war is, the parallel is close. It used to be an academic subject of debate if our civilization would ever be overwhelmed, like the Roman, by the barbarians. We talked vaguely of the Chinese, but the danger was nearer home. One speaks of barbarians in the Greek sense, not necessarily savages, but people not possessing our own ideals of life, our own standards of conduct, of virtues and vices. Well, the outbreak of this war faced us immediately with the more than possible end of our civilization, as Western Europe has understood it since the Middle Ages,

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with all its inheritance of Christian ethics, however short our practice may fall, of chivalry, of striving after light and freedom. The mere outbreak, even if we had been certain to win and the worst evil sure to be averted, shattered at once the illusions of peaceful progress and happiness to be got by commerce dear to Victorian "thinkers," and persisting into our own day. "This is dreadful; I never dreamed of it," must have been the thought of many a Victorian survivor, intelligently immersed in the smaller, happier things which war knocked to pieces.

Dreadful truly, and tremendous beyond imagination, which furthermore many things tended to clog. For one, it took us a long time to cease thinking of the war as war had been previously understood in this country, as an affair of specialized, professional men, not involving, save indirectly, the whole nation. The ancient idea of entire tribes hurling themselves on one another in battle, agreeable to the German theory of civilization, and now forced by them on the rest of the world, took long to sink into our general consciousness, though it seemed always to have attractions for certain military minds.

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We thought of the Napoleonic wars, devastating by their length but never at any moment involving directly more than a very small fraction of our population. When the question was raised of running the Derby at Epsom as usual—which I confess appealed to me as a piece of bravado, though the idea of a holiday crowd was offensive—we were reminded of its happening during the Crimea. The Crimea ! Then there was the difficulty present in all great and complicated matters of not seeing the wood for the trees. There was this or that point in the fighting, this or that danger, this or that mistake, this or that private effort or private suffering. The greater issues inevitably fell into the background of our minds.

It is not wonderful, then, that there has been often a disproportion between the mighty issues and terrific difficulties and various well-meant suggestions for meeting them. I do not write in any carping spirit. Every little helps, as they say, and it is better to make a small effort than none at all. But some of the things proposed and discussed and fussed about as though they could affect the course of the war were

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curiously small. "If only curates would smoke fewer cigarettes!" Propositions almost as trivial as that have been solemnly promulgated and argued. (I will not name them, not wishing to start further argument or annoy anybody.) It is not, I think, uncharitable to imagine that something besides the interest of the country was sometimes an inspiring cause, that some practices were denounced by those who had no mind to them at any time and took the occasion of the war to press their dislikes—and possibly compounded for a little sin of self-righteousness at the same time. Also—and here I note a real disadvantage in this disproportion—it is possible that some people who might have done more stopped short at a trivial sacrifice, real or vicarious, which could make no difference at all. A, who dislikes cigars, for example, insists that B ought not to smoke them in war-time, and both A and B (if he gives them up) think that now they have "done their bit." I know I exaggerate, but something of that spirit I have seen, and I have noticed that men working for the country with all the energy of their brains have not, as a rule, insisted

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much on these little things. Other strange signs of imagination falling short have been suggestions for the conduct of the war. One writer thought the country might be saved if the Government were to consist of popular novelists and essayists. I wonder if they laughed or cried.

These are trivial matters : I come to one which was not. There are disproportion and want of imagination in regard to the issues and scale of the war, and also, a more poignant thing, in regard to what all wars imply ; I mean the facing of near death in the fullness of young life or the chance of the rest of it being maimed and suffering. There again, our minds do not easily follow the words, and such an excuse is needed for the disproportion to which I refer. It belongs to the past and may be mentioned now with no injuriousness. Every man and woman with whom I have talked about it has agreed with me, and no frank comment by me on things at home can omit it. I refer to the sickening vulgarity and levity with which too often, before service was compulsory, appeals were made for soldiers. They were asked to go into a hell on earth and risk

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death, when the risk was almost an even chance, in all the spirit of somebody getting up a football team or even a cheap-jack selling his wares. "Is your best boy in khaki?" The humiliation of that poster will not be lightly forgotten. Let us be clear about the matter. The levity of soldiers about their task, and their likely fate, is a part of their fine spirit; that levity makes us proud. But levity in others who are asking them to fight that they themselves may be safe is below any word of contumely. It is not necessary to assume it in those responsible for such appeals as that poster. No doubt there was no levity or vulgarity in their thoughts; they believed that those qualities in their appeals were popular and successful. And that is precisely why I think it serviceable to write about the matter. Foreigners who were shocked by such appeals may well have been even more shocked by the excuse. And the excuse, I am absolutely convinced, is a libel on Englishmen. I spoke to many of humble position about it and they all said the same thing; they were disgusted. Men joined in spite of, not because of, such appeals to light-minded excitement. I cannot

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altogether deny that the levity apparent in those posters was reflected, if less vulgarly, here and there in private. It was just want of imagination, I know ; but a light-hearted scolding of young men, whose reasons for hanging back were not known, by men only a few years themselves over the military age, was sometimes inexpressibly nauseous. I was delighted when the scolders made fools of themselves, talking to wounded soldiers in mufti on the assumption that they were " slackers " and so forth. There was one delicious case a of naval captain, who had done one of the finest things in the war and had received every possible decoration, and who, travelling in mufti, enjoyed a lecture of half an hour at the hands of somebody disgusted at his not being in the trenches.

That sort of folly is more or less over now, and indeed every sort of disproportion is of necessity on the wane. We may not now—we may never—realize all that is at stake in the war. But we were blind, indeed, if we did not realize what that stake is costing our manhood. Can any middle-aged man at home see—as he sees every day in the streets—young men with a limb gone and

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strange paradoxes about the war, paradoxes which would have shocked the patriots of the Press ; but what matter ? They had fought well. And there is a pathos of its own in mental conceits and funny young affectations being carried into the dreadful ordeal. A boy I met, having just left school and the University, had resolutely refused any calling but that of a philosopher. He did not profess to write books or otherwise express his philosophy : he would simply be a philosopher. He is a Flying Corps boy now and risks his life many times a day. . . . Yes, the young intellectuals give us few regrets indeed in this war of wars. I sometimes wonder—with apologies to my contemporaries—if the young intellectuals of the nineties, when I was a young man too and may have been counted among them, would have done as well as they. I hope so, but I think we were less free from the morbid side of intelligence, less active and wholesome, and therefore, less fit to face and go through the ordeal. Better for us now, or those of us who survived it, if it had come to us.

VII

POLITICS AND PAPERS

“**I**F we could only shoot all the politicians!” said A. “If we could only hang all the journalists!” said B, and A and B agreed that both massacres would conduce to our winning the war.

Probably the average politician or journalist would be surprised if he knew, as politeness prevents his knowing, how general, among a large section of his countrymen, and how vehement has been the professed desire for his extinction since the war began. People did not mean all they said, no doubt, but behind these petulant phrases was a good deal of real bitterness. It is far indeed from my mind to make a general attack either on politicians or journalists, among whom are very many men who have worked their hardest for their country in the face of grave and baffling difficulties. But the bitterness is worth explaining.

Some of the reasons are on the surface and

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some of them are unfair. General abuse of politicians, for example, on the ground of mistakes, or what seemed to be mistakes, is nearly always unfair at a time of such complications. The critics ignore difficulties or do not know of them. Downright and discreditable stupidity there must have been, because there always is in all human affairs on a large scale. A course pursued with unhappy results in one direction, however, has often been taken, inevitably, to avoid worse results in another, and the latter cannot be stated in public, and so on. A parallel injustice is done to journalists in regard to their unfortunate prophecies. Their readers wanted conjectures, and the poor men did their best with the facts and reasoning power at their disposal : in private we all of us have been making howlers in our prophecies. . . . Other reasons are merely partial. Party spirit is inveterate among us, and the old party feelings having gone (except to some extent among politicians themselves) they have been replaced by differences on policies at issue in the war. People also, naturally, if childish, have imported feeling into their views as “ optimists ” and “ pessi-

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mists" and regarded their opposites with impatience and dislike. These are objections to some journalists and politicians, not to all, but they have contributed to a general irritation.

Perhaps the most obvious cause of that on the surface as regards journalists is the perpetual lecturing and scolding to which numerous writers have subjected us. Many have shared the opinion which I hold strongly that in the early part of the war grave disservice was done to the country, and grave injury caused to it among our Allies, by the writers who constantly belittled its efforts and parroted their "when shall we realize that we are at war?" (That phrase became a common catchword and I have heard of its being used by an impatient shop assistant to a lady whose two sons had been killed.) They seemed to be furious, as it were, with those who did not share their nervous excitement but reflected our traditional freedom from panic, and they shouted fatuously for that to be done at once which could only be done after long preparation. With these there is some serious quarrel. But putting that phase aside I have noticed a sustained

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air of the scolding schoolmaster intelligibly irritating to the nerves. It would not be unnatural if some of us were in rather a touchy frame of mind, irresponsible to lectures. For the sake of the supreme crisis of the country, individual liberties have been given up to an extent undreamed of here for centuries. Our native dislike of all officials and our prompt resentment of their least encroachment have been suppressed. We have approached in some ways to a German system which we loathe and rightly believe to be infinitely inferior to our own—except for this purpose of fighting them. All that had to be done, but it has not left some of us in the mood to welcome the schoolmaster's airs. When, for example, a man is just keeping his head above water, with a much decreased income and much increased claims on it, without money or credit, it annoys him to be told by his newspaper that unless he invests in the War Loan he is an unpatriotic scoundrel. One is apt to wonder if the anonymous writer practises all he preaches.

An irritant against politicians has been frequently an appearance of preoccupation with trifles instead of with the war, and that,

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of course, has extended to journalists also. There is a good deal of injustice about this. Politicians and journalists have a certain amount of normal business outside the war, and have to attend to it, just as a solicitor or a doctor has to attend to his. I am bound to confess that there have been rather startling instances. On one occasion, for example, the House of Commons had a "scene" inflicted on it by one of its mountebanks, and an evening paper printed all the silly affair, with the mountebank's *ipsissima verba*, in large type—news interesting to the rest of us from Salonika being printed small. But that sort of thing is rare. Politicians, contrariwise, have marvelled that matters transacted by them, in normal times of absorbing interest, such as the electoral reform, have gone without a sign of excitement outside their House. The truth is that we who are not fighting or working solely for the war have our own various businesses thrust upon us, but outside them have no care for anything but the war and its consequences for the country and for individual men and women : how could it be otherwise ? Only, unlike politics, our businesses are not

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advertised in the papers : if they were, we might seem triflers to one another.

Underneath these surface reasons lies a far deeper one. It affects the attitude of many of us to politicians and journalists at all times, and has made it hostile in the war. By other men of education and thought, politicians and journalists, taken in the mass or the average, are regarded so far as their profession goes as men whose views and efforts are occupied with appearances and not with the realities of life. (I have happened on a distinction of Plato's, but, of course, my sense is that of common speech.) I can say that without any suspicion of conceit about myself, since my own working life, in the writing of books and so forth, has been engaged with appearances also. But soldiers, sailors, men of science, whether of theory or practice, men who manage industrial concerns, and the like, generally have this opinion of politicians as such. There is some injustice in it, no doubt, but it is not all unjust. It is a vice of democratic societies in which political power depends ultimately on popular favour, that those who seek it should not desire to do things but only to

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have the appearance of doing things. The only cure for this is popular intelligence. Meanwhile it is the price we pay for liberty, or if a gloomy reader prefers to say so, for the illusion of liberty—and the illusion is better than conscious servitude. How far we are really a democratic community may be disputed, but with all respect to certain contemporary observers we are certainly democratic enough for this vice to be fairly evident among our politicians, and for a similar reason it is evident in the newspapers also. It is, as I have suggested, the men who themselves are in close touch with reality and necessarily do things, who most dislike it. Now, this terrific war has multiplied these men. Men do things who dealt with appearances before, and men always at grips with reality have felt the clutch of it more closely. Consequently the dislike has multiplied also and has grown in strength. The most bitter comment on politicians and their ways I have heard came from a man who controlled a great practical enterprise involved in the war, and I have heard many from soldiers and workers of all kinds. "All for show" is the burden, and, of

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course, insincerity is the charge which accompanies it.

How far actual measures taken by politicians in the war and how far newspaper articles prompting them are justly saddled with this charge it is beyond me to argue. Certain minor measures at home do seem to me to have been advocated and done simply for show and with no practical effect. But I credit politicians and journalists also with doing what they could, in the main, for the country, and if a normal vice may come up now and then all sorts of men have their peculiar faults. It is my business to record only as an observer a feeling widely spread among men of ability and thoughtfulness. That, and to hope as an optimist that the faults they pillory will partly disappear in a new spirit of public life. One may always hope.

VIII

DISPROPORTION

TRULY to envisage the immensity of the issues at stake in this war surpasses all but the rarest of imaginations. We try to express it in words, but the words are like numbers when they run to billions ; our minds do not follow them. We speak of Greeks and Persians, and, immeasurably greater though the scale of this war is, the parallel is close. It used to be an academic subject of debate if our civilization would ever be overwhelmed, like the Roman, by the barbarians. We talked vaguely of the Chinese, but the danger was nearer home. One speaks of barbarians in the Greek sense, not necessarily savages, but people not possessing our own ideals of life, our own standards of conduct, of virtues and vices. Well, the outbreak of this war faced us immediately with the more than possible end of our civilization, as Western Europe has understood it since the Middle Ages,

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with all its inheritance of Christian ethics, however short our practice may fall, of chivalry, of striving after light and freedom. The mere outbreak, even if we had been certain to win and the worst evil sure to be averted, shattered at once the illusions of peaceful progress and happiness to be got by commerce dear to Victorian "thinkers," and persisting into our own day. "This is dreadful; I never dreamed of it," must have been the thought of many a Victorian survivor, intelligently immersed in the smaller, happier things which war knocked to pieces.

Dreadful truly, and tremendous beyond imagination, which furthermore many things tended to clog. For one, it took us a long time to cease thinking of the war as war had been previously understood in this country, as an affair of specialized, professional men, not involving, save indirectly, the whole nation. The ancient idea of entire tribes hurling themselves on one another in battle, agreeable to the German theory of civilization, and now forced by them on the rest of the world, took long to sink into our general consciousness, though it seemed always to have attractions for certain military minds.

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We thought of the Napoleonic wars, devastating by their length but never at any moment involving directly more than a very small fraction of our population. When the question was raised of running the Derby at Epsom as usual—which I confess appealed to me as a piece of bravado, though the idea of a holiday crowd was offensive—we were reminded of its happening during the Crimea. The Crimea ! Then there was the difficulty present in all great and complicated matters of not seeing the wood for the trees. There was this or that point in the fighting, this or that danger, this or that mistake, this or that private effort or private suffering. The greater issues inevitably fell into the background of our minds.

It is not wonderful, then, that there has been often a disproportion between the mighty issues and terrific difficulties and various well-meant suggestions for meeting them. I do not write in any carping spirit. Every little helps, as they say, and it is better to make a small effort than none at all. But some of the things proposed and discussed and fussed about as though they could affect the course of the war were

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curiously small. "If only curates would smoke fewer cigarettes!" Propositions almost as trivial as that have been solemnly promulgated and argued. (I will not name them, not wishing to start further argument or annoy anybody.) It is not, I think, uncharitable to imagine that something besides the interest of the country was sometimes an inspiring cause, that some practices were denounced by those who had no mind to them at any time and took the occasion of the war to press their dislikes—and possibly compounded for a little sin of self-righteousness at the same time. Also—and here I note a real disadvantage in this disproportion—it is possible that some people who might have done more stopped short at a trivial sacrifice, real or vicarious, which could make no difference at all. A, who dislikes cigars, for example, insists that B ought not to smoke them in war-time, and both A and B (if he gives them up) think that now they have "done their bit." I know I exaggerate, but something of that spirit I have seen, and I have noticed that men working for the country with all the energy of their brains have not, as a rule, insisted

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much on these little things. Other strange signs of imagination falling short have been suggestions for the conduct of the war. One writer thought the country might be saved if the Government were to consist of popular novelists and essayists. I wonder if they laughed or cried.

These are trivial matters : I come to one which was not. There are disproportion and want of imagination in regard to the issues and scale of the war, and also, a more poignant thing, in regard to what all wars imply ; I mean the facing of near death in the fullness of young life or the chance of the rest of it being maimed and suffering. There again, our minds do not easily follow the words, and such an excuse is needed for the disproportion to which I refer. It belongs to the past and may be mentioned now with no injuriousness. Every man and woman with whom I have talked about it has agreed with me, and no frank comment by me on things at home can omit it. I refer to the sickening vulgarity and levity with which too often, before service was compulsory, appeals were made for soldiers. They were asked to go into a hell on earth and risk

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death, when the risk was almost an even chance, in all the spirit of somebody getting up a football team or even a cheap-jack selling his wares. "Is your best boy in khaki?" The humiliation of that poster will not be lightly forgotten. Let us be clear about the matter. The levity of soldiers about their task, and their likely fate, is a part of their fine spirit; that levity makes us proud. But levity in others who are asking them to fight that they themselves may be safe is below any word of contumely. It is not necessary to assume it in those responsible for such appeals as that poster. No doubt there was no levity or vulgarity in their thoughts; they believed that those qualities in their appeals were popular and successful. And that is precisely why I think it serviceable to write about the matter. Foreigners who were shocked by such appeals may well have been even more shocked by the excuse. And the excuse, I am absolutely convinced, is a libel on Englishmen. I spoke to many of humble position about it and they all said the same thing; they were disgusted. Men joined in spite of, not because of, such appeals to light-minded excitement. I cannot

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altogether deny that the levity apparent in those posters was reflected, if less vulgarly, here and there in private. It was just want of imagination, I know ; but a light-hearted scolding of young men, whose reasons for hanging back were not known, by men only a few years themselves over the military age, was sometimes inexpressibly nauseous. I was delighted when the scolders made fools of themselves, talking to wounded soldiers in mufti on the assumption that they were " slackers " and so forth. There was one delicious case a of naval captain, who had done one of the finest things in the war and had received every possible decoration, and who, travelling in mufti, enjoyed a lecture of half an hour at the hands of somebody disgusted at his not being in the trenches.

That sort of folly is more or less over now, and indeed every sort of disproportion is of necessity on the wane. We may not now—we may never—realize all that is at stake in the war. But we were blind, indeed, if we did not realize what that stake is costing our manhood. Can any middle-aged man at home see—as he sees every day in the streets—young men with a limb gone and

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not be ashamed to be alive ? And seeing their gay courage, and their jolly responsiveness, must he not feel trebly the horror of the thing which has maimed them and left him whole ? We may blame our wits for one kind of disproportion ; if we have to blame our feelings for another kind we are less than human.

IX

THE WAR AND YOUTH

IN so far as our "leisured," or professional, or well-to-do people were concerned, the generation of young men and women who were to face the war were in better case for the ordeal than some earlier generations might have been. Such at least was my observation of them, and it was confirmed by observers with wider experience than my own. I think of the boys and girls in the twenties known to me and compare them with my contemporaries at that age. I think the "intellectuals" among the former were less unduly beguiled by paradoxes and whimsies and more concerned with genuine problems of thought, and that the lives of the thoughtless were more wholesome. There was less of untoward intrigue and more of jolly companionship between the sexes, leading naturally and sanely to early marriages. There was a more general grasp of life's realities and a more practical out-

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look. The spirit was young, younger than in my own time, but accepted, did not pettishly refuse to look at, the coming of older cares. Profit and loss are in everything, but for the purpose before them the profit was great. This may be fanciful; it may be unphilosophical to assert more than a superficial change in a quarter of a century; but it seems to me as though these young men and women were unconsciously prepared for their tremendous ordeal. It is needless to enlarge again on the spirit with which they have met it. I would try to express what seems to me its effect on them, as one may tell it from aspect and manner and talk. And to keep the impression distinct I will think only of those young men I have met who have been on active service, and of the young women known to me who themselves have taken active part in the war, or whose happiness is bound up with the fortune of fighting men. I speak of the really young, not of the older men who are fighting, or of the older women who are working, on whom the effect, save in the ^{few} exceptional cases, must needs be less vivid.

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There are two changes obvious to the eye, superficially opposed but really complementary, and often to be found in the same person—a greater gravity of outlook and a lighter and gayer spirit in the trivialities of conduct. On the one hand many young men, who before the war thought of nothing but sport, or the girls attracting them, now talk wisely and reasonably of the greater issues of the war—more wisely than many older stay-at-homes—of the views and temperaments of their men, of the nature of Germans, and going beyond the war show that they have thought of what may come afterwards, of social changes, of economic unfairness. And with that I have noticed a certain gravity of courtesy towards older men I had not noticed so much before. It would not have been altogether unnatural if, instead, there had been some feeling of contempt, perhaps showing itself slightly in manner, as for men who had run no such risks, seen no such horrors, endured no such hardships as themselves. But in truth those experiences have been too dreadful for little irritations. I have wondered, once or twice, at the serene politeness of some young officer,

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answering as well as they could be answered the foolish and casual questions of an ignorant greybeard—I dare say I have put such questions myself. I think it must often be the feeling that they are not really understood, that we who have not been there cannot in truth realize what their experiences mean, that causes such young men to break away when they can from anything to do with the sterner part of war and tell us funny stories of a characteristic Irish sergeant or an eccentric colonel—I have often observed that change of talk. But the graver outlook about the greater things is constant, and assuredly it needs no explanation : youth grows up swiftly when it looks on death.

As for gravity among the corresponding young women, which I confess I have not seen so often, it is partly, of course, a reflection of the young men's. But it also comes from unwonted work. Many a girl who formerly seemed to think that the work of the world was done mechanically and painlessly, that she might enjoy herself, now knows what work is, what it means to begin it when one is disinclined, and to go on with

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it long hours after one is dead-tired. It is a sobering experience. I am hedonist enough not to welcome it for them whole-heartedly, but one cannot doubt that it bodes good for our social life. Of the more compelling reason for gravity in some of them I will not speak now.

But observe the lighter side, how the boy from the Front, grave beyond his years when serious things are toward, frolics like a mad baby when he can, and plunges with entire abandonment into every pleasure offered him. A good-natured friend of mine, whose house was open all hours for these boys and girls to dance in, kept late hours indeed when leave was frequent. Dancing is what they chiefly desire, it seems. Of course there is some over-excitement in it all, a reaction from horrors, or from long and ugly monotony, or from both. As one said to me: "Of course the main thing is to see one's family and all that, but that's not enough. I must have lights and champagne and bands and dancing—I simply can't do without them." Partly it is reaction, this seemingly complete, irresponsible lightness and gaiety, but partly, also, if I am right, it is a deliberate putting on

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one side, both in boys and girls, of sad thoughts of the past and still more of the future, an insistent grasp on pleasure which is so brief—and may be so final. By most of us it is only in later life that this necessity of seizing the moment is felt, this philosophical refusal for a while to look on what may be. In this matter, also, war has forced the pace of youth.

I would say a word, though it is not to be easily said, and heaven knows not lightly, on a deeper question in the relations of those boys and girls. The need for taking what may be the only chance, and the general excitement of the war—for most excitement, as we know, passes from one to another of our emotions—have made a multitude of early marriages, and of them a terrible number have been ended by death. There is one thought in regard to this which may bring some consolation to those who look on, as its truth, if it is true, will bring consolation ultimately to those we pity. It is that prolonged sorrow in a loss can come only from relatively long association. The passionate courtship of a few weeks, and a married life of only a few days and then the

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Front and the end—this seems the most pitiful thing in the world, and the sorrow while it lasts may seem beyond all bearing. But it is in the nature of our being that it cannot last, save as a sad memory, for very long. The love of a few weeks and a real intimacy of life lasting years are not the same thing. There have been too many cases of this last cut short in the war that we should not take what comfort we may when the other is so ended. I think this fact, as it must be, explains what has offended a good many people in the speedy remarriage of many war widows. So often these are girls who had but a week or two of married life with one they had known for but a short time before; the sorrow cannot last and meanwhile the strong emotions and excitement of the war go on. . . . I think it is not difficult to understand and very stupid to blame. There is too much sorrow that must endure that we should grudge any happiness that may be found.

Well . . . what will be left of these effects of war on our youth when it is over? Of necessity, only the gravity of outlook, the

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better realizing of the world as it is. So much will be gained for what survives. It were bitter mockery to pretend it is any compensation to us for what is gone.

X

THE WAR AND AGE

I HAVE tried to express something of the effect the war has had on our young men and young women and would try now—a task for which I should be better qualified—to express something of its effect on their seniors. I will not say much about the very old; there is not very much to be said. In the main one has a simple pity for them. It is sad to have lived a normal, kindly, human life till old age, and in the last few years of it to face the piled-up horrors the Germans have brought upon the world, to bear the multiplied sorrows they have brought into private lives. I have sometimes thought it hard fortune not to have been born, myself, forty years before I was and to be for certain dead now, having kept intact all the Victorian illusions I should have enjoyed about the disappearance of war, the beneficence of science and the uninterrupted progress of mankind; I should think my survival hard

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fortune indeed were I seventy. Of course the very old have been affected in different ways. Some the war has quietly killed. I think of an old lady who up to the war, when she was over eighty, had been hearty and vigorous, travelling unattended and visiting her numerous descendants. She took the war bravely, and sat down to constant knitting for soldiers, but blow after blow came upon her affections and she quickly faded out of life. Most often the imagination of the very old is less easily and vividly stirred than that of their juniors, and they may have gained by that now; some old folk have gone on very serenely. And a few old men I know seem to have grown younger in the access of excitement and hot emotion. But in the main the very old, so far as the war has touched them, are simply to be pitied.

One need not write in so sad a strain of the middle-aged. I mean, mostly, those men who are definitely too old to fight, save for very rare exceptions, but not beginning to be counted old. Some of them, indeed, were counted quite young, and that brings me to a small matter which has its comic aspect.

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In England—I do not know how far elsewhere—at least in certain classes there was a considerable affectation of middle-aged men being young fellows. Some may have been so truly in the spirit : in that regard middle age is not a necessary period of life but a mental disease. But I mean that some were regarded, and regarded themselves, altogether as young. Men over forty—who were generally bachelors, but who might and ought to have had sons growing up—were “dear boys” to indulgent female friends. Many things helped this, an exact sameness in dress—in my youth it was different—clean-shaven faces, sometimes a wholesomely athletic life. I never believed that the really young shared in the illusion, and for my part propitiated them by insisting on my middle age—though I regretted in after years that I began doing so at thirty. In any case the war has knocked all that on the head. It was a harmless pose in its lighter aspects ; in its heavier, as when middle-aged men talked gaily of their amours, it was not so pleasant. Anyhow, it is dead. Men who were too old to fight in 1914 can be young men no more. Their age, with the limita-

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tions a world remade by war has put upon it, is stamped upon them for ever. Since they could not perform one function of young manhood, which had become the most important in the world, they are confessed beyond that period, and they may be no longer irresponsible young fellows. It is sad for some of them, but a gain of sincerity.

But if a spurious youth has been torn from some older men, how has the genuine authority which by tradition belongs to their age been affected? That of the very old, I think, hardly at all, but then that was always a matter of form and courtesy rather than a reality, and war has not affected the deference and courtesy shown to them by decent and kindly young people. But the middle-aged?

We must distinguish between the general authority of age out of doors, so to speak, and among acquaintances, and the domestic authority enjoyed by parents and guardians, aunts and uncles, and so forth. That had been toppling for a long time. In every period and country, more or less, there has been a constant revolt of youth and a constant complaint of it on the part

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of age. But in England, in the decade before the war, the revolt had become extremely effective. Many novels and some plays presented it, and we all had personal experience of it. Young people were intent on "living their own lives" and succeeded—in so far as the quest was not necessarily an illusion. No human creature ever "had it both ways" so completely as the young Englishwoman of the well-to-do classes—and if I am rightly informed the young American woman also. She was allowed a claim to be supported in comfort by her male folk and at the same time was granted independence of judgment and almost every vagary of conduct. (In my opinion she thrived on this indulgence and became a very jolly and interesting person.) Well, the war has obviously increased this independence in both sexes, but with this difference, that it is ten times more justified than it was before. The young men are performing a man's task and a most vital one: who can forbid them to order their lives apart from it in their own way? The young women—mainly; I do not believe the exceptions worth counting—are helping by any work

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they can do, and it takes them out of their homes into the world and calls for strength and will : they have a clearer case for independence of older restraint than (I speak of the classes best known to me) they ever had before. And both, everywhere I look, are without a fuss assuming that independence.

But I see with a smile a sort of *revanche* for middle age fifteen or twenty years hence, when the survivors of our young fighting men will be middle-aged with all the prestige of their achievements, to which the sons about them will have nothing to oppose. That is, if there is not another war then : if there is, this or any other speculation is vain, for the end of our world as we know it will be in sight. " Ah, my boy," the father will say to his insurgent son, " if you had been at Ypres you would know the necessity of discipline," and the son will be dumb before him. Or will the father remember his own independence and be indulgent ? That is not my reading of human nature. Still, that domestic *revanche* will be only partial.

As for the general authority of middle age where young and old forgather, I see it fade before my eyes. It is, of course, a matter of

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speech, of taking the stage, of being listened to attentively : youth must always have had its silent reservations. They were not always silent, by any means, before the war, and the frowardness of youth wrung retorts about "not even the youngest of us." But in general when they met together the older men prevailed ; they had experiences to cite, and famous acquaintances to quote and so forth. That is changed now ; young and old alike want to hear what the young man who has seen fighting has to say of it. Many a middle-aged talker, in clubs and elsewhere, accustomed to "give his tiny senate laws" must have had to abandon the centre of the stage before a young man from the Front. Poor middle age ! These lighter knocks are many.

But these are trivial thoughts and I come for a moment to graver matters. The great fact of the war for us middle-aged men, as it touches us in our own persons, is that it means a state of society in which, comparatively, we are not wanted. I know, of course, that hundreds of middle-aged men, or of old men for that matter, are doing work in the war of the utmost importance. But I am speak-

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ing of average, ordinary, middle-aged men like myself. The wide and all-embracing quality of this war must bring the fact home to us all. We live now in a world in which physical vigour and endurance are all-important—and we lack them. Well, war is not a perfect state of society ; mankind can produce better, and will again when it has suppressed the Germans. Meanwhile any hurt vanity in us cannot count much in our sadness. We must do what we can, and for the rest be content to stand aside. The world, whatever happens, must be a much harder place for most of us than it was, and our declining energies are likely to be occupied in living. As for the mere thought of our unimportance now, it should be, so far as we dwell on it, chastening. It is the habit of middle age to feel assured about the world and confident of its importance in it. This strange, vast, upsetting experience which has come upon us unprepared—in knowledge or imagination, or in both—should have chastened that confidence and made us modest before our juniors. I hope so.

XI

INSECURITY

SECURITY in the largest sense, for free institutions, for the development of our society, for a reasonable mode of life, is that for which we are chiefly fighting. Security for life and limb, the assurance that, except for one of the accidents which must happen now and then in normal life, we may go safely about our business, is a narrower use of the word. But one finds out that this narrower security meant something when it is removed. It is of the effects of this removal that I would write at present, as I have observed them in London. "In London!" the reader may exclaim with some derision, possibly having experienced more instant danger elsewhere, and I hasten to add that the effects I speak of are not very serious. For philosophical observation, however, it is perhaps better to take a case (like ours) when security is only just removed, so to speak, and normal life goes on as usual,

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than where it is reversed and the danger is instant everywhere, and life is not normal at all.

Security, like quietude, is never absolute, but its removal, like that of quietude, *is* absolute. The noise that removes quietude may be a little one, but if it does remove quietude for you, if it gets on your nerves, it might just as well be a great one : your state is altered. So with security. The effect of its removal, if it affects you at all, is absolute. The ingenious persons who compare the population of London with the number of people killed in an average raid, and seek to reassure their fellow-citizens by so working out the individual chance of being hit, waste their pains. Beyond a certain limit the chances seem the same. Ten thousand to one is much the same as one thousand to one, just as it seems much the same when you enter a lottery. The point is that the chance exists.

For several months now when the moon has been favourable for aeroplanes, and if the weather is otherwise favourable, as it has seemed to be unreasonably often, Londoners have known that they may suddenly

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hear an alarm, and that shortly afterwards security will be removed. Now the interest of the effects comes from the fact that they occur in a life which has remained obstinately normal. London, no doubt, wears a different aspect from that of peace-time; the place is full of soldiers serving at home or on leave from the Front; innumerable civilians are on jobs new to them; we are all thinking and talking about the war. But the structure of our life remains the same; we go to offices in the morning and manage to meet one another at lunch, and take a walk if we have time in the afternoon and dine as usual, if less amply, and take our recreation afterwards. Theatres go on and picture shows are opened and novels are published, and so on and so forth. Therefore we are not keyed up to the sudden dropping of high explosives. Soldiers on leave have often told me that they dislike the sudden bombardment here far more than infinitely more dangerous occurrences in places where they are the usual thing. We are entitled, then, I think, to some credit for our calmness, of which, in the sphere observed by me, I have to record little more than a slight

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ruffling. And also, I think, we are entitled to resent a little the attitude of those friends who, living securely in the country, look on our London air-raids as a joke. It is the disturbance of normality in the removal, absolute as I said, of the security which has been its background, and not a fear of being oneself hit, which touches the nerves and imagination.

Yet such is the effect of custom that I suppose very few of us give any thought worth mentioning to insecurity until its time is actually upon us. In the day, when—in a good hour be it spoken!—we are said to be immune, even though the day promises a raid at night and we have had one the night before, few of us bother ourselves, especially as the fineness of such a day disposes us to cheerfulness. The cheerfulness may be a little increased by the reaction from a disturbed night and that is all—but that in itself is an effect. As the evening approaches, as insecurity draws nearer, some thought of it may occur. For myself very often, as after my favourite and very beautiful walk in Kensington Gardens I turn towards my abode in the middle of London,

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I feel enraged by the stupid horror brought into a beautiful world by the Germans, and perhaps my rage is increased by the possibility that I am going to witness a fragment of the horror for myself. . . . The evening draws on, and let us suppose it is an evening when insecurity may come at any moment and we are sitting down to dinner. It is absurd to deny that there is some slight tension in the atmosphere. I am not going to describe an air-raid, but merely this particular aspect of the effect of insecurity on people, not even remotely approaching anything like serious alarm: panic is a coarser and I think a less interesting subject.

We all at times sit down to dinner with some private anxiety which good manners compel us to conceal. Now, too, if we feel any anxiety we must not show it, but the fact that, such as it is, it is more or less general makes a difference in two ways; it is increased by sympathy and it is less of a burden from being only nominally private. The tension shows itself in oddly different ways. Some people tend to silence, others to increased talkativeness and jocularly. Some people, more than at other times, like

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to discuss the chances of the affair, others are impatient of the subject. I notice in myself that while I feel a somewhat greater solidarity with the people I like, those who bore or irritate me are unusually annoying. Suppose, later, the raid to happen and to be in progress : one or more raiders have got through and the guns are near and bombs are heard. The modes of tension are of course strengthened. Impassivity is the general note, however. I am inclined to suspect of more than the average nervousness (*a*) those who profess to enjoy the uproar, and (*b*) those who refuse altogether to pay any attention to it. But of course the genuinely unmoved exist, and they are either stoics with iron nerves or people without any imagination at all, who must actually watch the effect of a bomb before they realize that it is unpleasant : it does not disparage humanity excessively to suppose that the latter are the more numerous. The more imaginative, of course, feel the discomfort of expectation out of proportion ; they are often the more truly calm when expectation is realized ; the first gun restores any nerve they have lost.

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It is in the rest of life, however, where no immediate chance of a raid is possible, that the effect of insecurity on normal life is subtlest and most interesting. As I have said, most of us banish the thing from our minds. But subconsciously the effect is with us. In the main it means a heightening of nervous life. Especially when a raid has been recent, I have noticed a more acute mind and temper in my friends. There is a quicker grasp on the moment. And if the moment is a good one, the happy temperament makes the most of it, and the unhappy finds it subconsciously marred by an unpleasant background.

But I have philosophized enough on a really trivial theme. For as I said in the beginning the effects of this insecurity are slight. They won't help the Germans.

XII

THE WAR AND BOOKS

I USE the most general word, because I wish neither to beg nor to argue any unprofitable question as to what is and is not literature or journalism, or what you will. And my article will be very general indeed. It will attempt no cataloguing, and if it mentions a book or two it will be only by way of illustration. I wish to record what effect the war has had on the books produced in England since it began, in the hope that there may be some use in a brief and plain statement, though the brevity be crude and the plainness commonplace.

At the beginning there was dismay about their own fortunes, in so far as they thought about them, among those who wrote for a living, and the publishers. It would be hard enough to write, and if they could write nobody would read them. Nobody would read anything but newspapers and the books about the war which would appear in due

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time. That has gone the way of other bad prophecies. Of course the main reading has been about the war, and equally of course writers who were not specialists on technical matters apart from the war—and many of these too—have been deflected wholly or partially on to the war. But other books have been produced and read in great numbers, and the fortunes of their writers have been affected far less by the preoccupation of readers than by the price of paper and scarcity of manual labour. Naturally there has been a host of books giving an account of the war as it proceeded, and there has been, less expected, a wonderful and multitudinous issue of books of verses. Of the making of books the war assuredly has not brought the end visibly nearer.

Coming to a rough classification I take first the books of which the war is the direct theme, and first of these one inevitably thinks of the poetry. That the war would produce its poets, of whatever quality, was certain enough; but we have all been surprised by their number. As for its effect on those already established, it has been in the main, so far, disappointing. Both older

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and younger poets, when the war broke out, for the most part fumbled with it. They were as men amazed and not knowing what to say; the pity was, I venture to think, that so many felt bound to say something at once. Theirs was not "emotion remembered in tranquillity"; the emotion was there, no doubt, but its expression seemed to be somehow forced. Of the older poets not one, I think, approached the quality of Mr. Hardy's quietly intense "Men that march away" until, in the end of October 1917, Mr. A. E. Housman published his nobly ironic "Army of Mercenaries" in commemoration of Ypres. Of the younger poets, already known, Rupert Brooke stands out, and of him one may surely say that the inspiration of the war carried him, in those sonnets which were all that life spared him to write, to a greater height of pure poetry than he had gained before. I come to the young soldiers, not known as poets before unless to their friends, of whom "so many and so many" have published books of verse. Reviewers have overpraised a great many, very naturally. It is impossible to judge composedly and strictly the lines, which must

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have come from a glowing heart, of a young man who is fighting for our honour and freedom, still less of one who has died for them. But all that allowed for, the war has given us more than a few fresh writers on whom is the unmistakable mark of the real poet. Julian Grenfell's achievement was sure before his many-sided life was cut short. Edward Wyndham Tennant showed even greater promise than accomplishment, though that was already fine. Captain Robert Graves has shown a family gift at its best, with a gay humour which moves one to laughter and tears at once. . . . In nearly all these young poets I notice that the inspiration of the war is to a wonderful serenity and acceptance. Its horrors are accepted as one accepts a storm or a flood, and they turn constantly aside from them to gay enjoyment of comradeship, or of wistful appreciation of such beauty as came into their lives campaigning. It is perhaps significant that the only instance of revolt and bitterness and satire I have read comes from one not of English blood, Mr. Siegfried Sassoon. For the other mood is in the great tradition of our soldier poets.

Of the other books directly caused by the

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war, I will not linger over the obvious and inevitable, the historical narratives and criticisms of the various campaigns or episodes in them. I am most incompetent to judge such work. Time, also, will bring fuller knowledge to it and the best of it must be as yet incomplete. Books showing the lives and minds of our armies, on the other hand, gain by being done at the moment and on the spot, and many of these—the best known are “Ian Hay’s,” and they are perhaps the best—will always be valuable and interesting, for the making of millions of men into soldiers in a few months is at the lowest an extraordinary thing. One awaits the books of the same sort which will be written of the American armies, to compare them with ours and the French. Businesslike I should call the dominant note of our men as Ian Hay and his colleagues see them, and I do not know that I should want a finer, knowing that with us the deeper feelings are the least articulate.

The sociology, so to speak, of the war at home has hardly got as yet beyond the stage of novels and articles, or of material for later thought. One welcomes every good

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observer, and in this regard Mr. Wells with his "Mr. Britling" is invaluable. Valuable, in a slighter way, for its types is Mrs. Humphry Ward's novel about the war, though its theme is a curious side issue.

Then there are the books which the war may be said to come into rather than to inspire. Their authors write in their accustomed way and with their old interests, but find they cannot keep off it. Why should they? I was talking with a distinguished woman the other day who complained of a reviewer's complaint that she had not kept away from the war in her last novel. I said he was a fool and moreover I thought so. The idea that any vital writer, dealing with our present life, could exclude the most tremendous fact in it is absurd. But in the books I am speaking of, the war is found as part of the characters' environment, or as forming a solution of their stories rather than is taken as the motive force. It comes in this way into other books than novels. An interesting work, for example, of popular science, "Modern Man and his Forerunners," lately published, which deals biologically with the history of the race, naturally has

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something to say of its latest catastrophe. And so with some others.

I come to books which so far as their themes go the war has not affected at all. No doubt there have been fewer, but there have been many, and it is well that those who care for their subjects should still pursue, to some extent, the normal course of their mental lives ; else surely the obsession of the war would drive the thinking minority of us mad. Scientific books and technical books of all sorts have come out. In the case of biographies one suspects that they were written, or at any rate largely prepared, before the war, because it must be almost impossibly hard to concentrate oneself on another human or non-technical theme with the war in one's mind. It was good to take refuge for a while in Mr. Gosse's " Life of Swinburne," but I can hardly think that the sensitive mind of its author can have written the most of it in the years since the war. So with Sir Sidney Colvin's " Life of Keats." But they and other good works of the sort have come out since the war—to our great relief. As for the lighter stuff of novels and essays in which the war plays no part, I have

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an idea that they were written with some difficulty ; rightly written, for they were wanted, and it was their authors' business, but written more as a task than was formerly the case. That, at least, has been my impression of the few I have read ; it seemed as though the writers were imitating themselves as they were before the war, not expressing themselves as they are in truth now.

Such is my view of the effects the war has had on our books in England, so far as it has gone. We have not had, and had no right to expect, so far, any work that in feeling and imagination should be comparable to the tremendous events among which we live. It is my hope that some genius is brooding on them and may give out in due time a great, unifying achievement worthy of the thoughts and sorrows of the times. If it should be as great as Tolstoy's expression of Russia in the wars of Napoleon in "War and Peace" . . . But we must wait for that.

XIII

SOLDIER POETS

I RETURN to the stream of poetry written by our young men on service which began to flow early in the war and presently spread to a broad flood. Multitudes of little books of verses : it is an odd result at first sight, and my purpose is to examine, so far as I can, its mental and material causes. I do not propose now to criticize the quality of all this verse. Some of it has revealed genius and definite achievement ; more has shown fine aptitude and promise ; much, inevitably, appeals only by the artlessness and sincerity of the gallant young man who wrote it. Its nature, the spirit of it, may come partly into my theme later on, but that theme is, in effect, simply the quantity.

One consideration is obvious. We had soldier poets in Elizabethan days and earlier, when every gentleman was trained to arms and the age produced freely that gallant type

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who was soldier, man of affairs, scholar and poet in one. Later we had soldier poets in our Civil Wars of the seventeenth century. But for the last two hundred years, until recent days, since our army has been a comparatively small and specialized affair, it has consisted in the main of aristocrats and peasants, the latter inarticulate and the former of a class which had been losing its culture and interest in the arts, and themselves seldom likely, if their taste lay in those directions, to have become professional soldiers. So most of our war poetry was written by civilians. But in this war, young men of every condition and mental aptitude have been called upon to fight, those who were already poets, like Rupert Brooke, those who were beginning to try, and those destined to be or to try to be. Our young poets, to speak roughly, must be in the army or nowhere. That is an obvious consideration, but it does not cover the ground. It does not explain why these books of verses should be so much more numerous than in peace-time, why, that is to say, so many young men have been writing verses who in peace would never

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have done so. And why, in comparison, have books in prose, written by the same sort of young men, been so few ?

A partial explanation is, no doubt, to be found in heightened emotion, just as so many of us, when young and in love, have written verses who wrote them at no other time, with the difference that the soldier poets had not our reasons of privacy and shyness for withholding their verses from the public. But this does not really take us far. A young man first joining or first going out may feel the fire of patriotism burn to his finger-tips, and Heaven forbid I should deny that it burns latent within him all the time. But war is a grimly searching and trying business, in the main a grimly monotonous business, more especially so has been this war in trenches—a muddy monotony varied by flashes from hell—and must needs beat down larger emotions below the surface of feeling. As a fact we do not find in our soldiers' poetry a very frequent expression of patriotism, or a sense of defending civilization, or on the other side a realization of the ghastly suicide of humanity, near to which the German aggression is

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bringing the world. The immediate emotions are forced to the surface and occupy it all—weariness, the sense of comradeship, grief or admiration for a friend, joy in some brief interlude of decent, human life, in the sight of a garden or a country house. These are not modes of greatly heightened emotion; they are modes of such emotion, individual and immediate, as extreme stress of body can leave to humanity.

Then, again, how is it that these personal and immediate emotions have filled so many little books of verse? I think the true and complete explanation takes us back to the beginnings of poetry. A very great deal of this soldier poetry must have been thought out when writing was impossible, when the young poet was marching, or on duty in trenches, not actually occupied but alert for what may happen, or in the dark. Even so the earliest poets lived before writing was, or were men who could not write. They had, first of all, to remember, and what greater aid to memory than rhythm or rhyme? I am not dogmatizing about early poetry, but it is pretty obvious that a composition of any length to be remembered by

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its producer, or to be faithfully learned from another, must have such an aid. Prose comes with writing. Later on, when prose has itself become an art, the maker of it may think out periods with no pen or paper to hand, but that is a rare mental occupation, at least in contemporary England. The average young soldier poet, I fancy, looks on prose as an affair to be accomplished anyhow, rapidly, with the paper before him. He would not think it out in silent night-watches, nor probably, on the other hand, would he be able to compose his poetry in the conditions in which he writes his letters home, with his comrades talking round about him. So having an emotion in his heart, the recent death of a comrade, or what it may be, and having time and silence before him, he turns his mind to rhythm and rhyme and so expresses his emotion in a form both worthier to his thinking than prose, and more readily to be remembered and to be recorded on paper afterwards. That, I suggest, is the explanation. It is partly confirmed by the average of the forms of verse these poets use. A little before the war there was a fashion of *vers libres* among our young writers. It

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was not good for them, for it resulted very largely in a mere cutting up of slovenly prose into unequal lengths ; it was an excuse for laziness and confused thought, and it produced a great deal of foolish pretentiousness. Well, our soldier poets will none of it, and I take the reason to be that it is of no use to them. As most of them, inevitably, would have practised it, they might as well try to remember prose. On the contrary, they have mostly adopted very simple forms of stanza, or have invented for themselves slight variants of well-known models. They think out what scans and rhymes—and can be remembered. Those with literary culture and the memory, for example, of famous sonnets in their heads may choose that or another more difficult form—more difficult to use but not more difficult to remember, once it is mastered. Some of these young poets would have written verses, no doubt, war or no war. But the explanation of the number, so far beyond the record of peace, is, I think, to be found in these simple facts : the stimulus of unwonted life, the consciousness of emotions which seem to call for unwonted expression, long hours for silent thought

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but not for silent writing, and above all the aid to memory of rhythm and rhyme. For those who happily are destined to survive and write poetry in peace, this necessity of composition away from pens and paper has been a fine preparation, for it has turned them from fanciful experiments to tradition, and the mastery of what should be the elements of the art; in poetry, as in other human efforts, to do well you must begin at the beginning.

XIV

THE WAR AND THE THEATRE

IT happens that I hold an official position which makes it impossible in etiquette for me to discuss the wisdom or unwisdom of allowing or not allowing this or that play to be produced, and, I think, bad in taste for me to criticize the quality of plays or players. It is possible, however, and perhaps better to describe the effect of the war on the theatre without going into such matters. There is plenty to observe which should be of interest—if only the reader, as is only too likely, has not observed it all for himself long ago.

A few people think that the theatres ought to have been shut up altogether. One of their reasons is that the labour spent in them could have been better used. If I am at all right in what I shall say later of the service done by the theatres, then the labour of the men and women employed in them—the former being, of course, all over military

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age or unfit for service—would most certainly have been very unwisely turned into other channels in which, from its extent, it could have had very little effect. The other reason is one of taste. The times, say the few people, are too sad and solemn for amusement. *De gustibus* . . . but it is worth while to say why one disagrees. In private sorrow there are those who shut themselves up and avoid their fellows, and still more who do not go to public amusements. There are others who feel that they bear their sorrow better by refusing to show it outwardly, by mixing in society as before, and talking of the ordinary things. Some of these may stay away from the theatre as a matter of custom ; others, indifferent to opinion, go if inclined. No one but a fool doubts their sorrow on that account. The war has touched most of us in England with private sorrow at one time or another, but private sorrow has not all of us in its grip all the time, and even so, as I have indicated, many of us would have taken it better by not giving up the superficial distractions of ordinary life. All the more does this apply to a public sorrow, even to so great a calamity

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as this one. It is a great strain ; to the most callous and unimaginative of us it is at least a great depression ; anything that helps to keep the nerves and spirits normal is a national service. Moreover, there are the men who have fought and for whom the refuge of the theatre's appeal is ten times more acceptable, and hundreds of thousands of them have welcomed it. Had the war been a matter of a few weeks, the country might have borne an exclusive intensity of absorption in it. Since it has lasted for years, and has an indefinite prospect of lasting, relief on occasion is a necessity, and it is found here as harmlessly as anywhere in regard to work for the war. The case for the theatre is overwhelming.

It follows that managers and players have done good service in sticking to their business. They have done so manfully in the face of grave difficulties and drawbacks—early perturbations, darkened streets, paucity of cabs, overcrowding of other means of locomotion, taxation, air-raids. Surely there is not an Englishman who has not felt a glowing pride in the nerve and pluck his countrymen and countrywomen showed on

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the stage when guns and bombs interrupted their playing. I should have expected their courage, but the disciplined nerve which enabled them to continue as though nothing were happening is wonderful to me. Lacking the discipline, I do not believe I could have done it, though I hope I should not have been more frightened than the others. I have played many parts as an amateur in my time, and my memory is still fairly good, but I think the explosions would have driven my "lines" out of my head. It should abolish finally the popular belief that players tend to be a self-indulgent and neurotic folk. (As a fact, success in that calling nearly always means a careful and wholesome life outside the theatre.) Bless them, from stars to supers!

Air-raids have had an effect, naturally, on the size of audiences on nights when they are likely to happen. It is one thing to sit pluckily through a performance in spite of a possibly lethal uproar outside and another to ask for such an experience, and on those nights some theatres, naturally, have been closed. Apart from this matter, the effect of the war on audiences has been different in

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London and the provinces. London has had a constant influx of soldiers on leave, of whom a majority wish to see a few plays before they return. There are also a great many war-workers living in London who are not normally there, and many of these refresh themselves in the theatre. Provincial theatres have not enjoyed such new audiences, and their ordinary audiences are depleted, and they have also to contend with great obstacles to the transport of companies and properties from place to place. As a result, while many plays and theatres in London have done well, the provincial theatres have been very badly hit. One can judge of the matter by the number of new plays produced, of which I have an accurate knowledge. In normal times far more new plays are produced in the provinces than in London, mostly melodramas of a simple fashion, but also plays of great merit, intellectually and in freshness of idea, produced by enthusiastic societies and "repertory" theatres in the big provincial cities. The number of the new plays produced outside London has fallen off far more than the number inside its boundaries.

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And now I come to the effect of the war on the nature of the plays, perhaps the most interesting part of the subject. It was unreasonable if anybody expected the war to produce a great outburst of dramatic genius. Other wars have been stimulating, but aloof from our daily lives ; this one has been on the minds and nerves of all imaginative people every day. Perhaps when it is over . . . A few good plays dealing directly with the war might have been expected ; the reader must judge without my assistance to what extent that expectation has been realized. Of plays, good or bad, which made the war their direct theme, the most were produced in its early days. There was a fair crop of melodramas about it, chiefly in the provinces. The simple machinery of plot, love-interest, and comic relief was much as before, but the hero became a soldier always, the place of the villain, formerly as a rule a man with no other business, was taken either by a German spy or a brutal German officer, and some of the scenes were in the trenches or in Belgian houses. There is still occasionally a play of the sort—one or two are successes, but the production of

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them rapidly declined. The interest in them was based on curiosity and ignorance: as knowledge spread people found it enough in itself, and turned from the imitation to themes which took their minds away from it. That was very soon the case in London, and I remember seeing quite early in the war, in the course of a "revue," an incident which depicted the brutal treatment of Belgian women by German ruffians and finding the people about me distressed by its inclusion. Of course the war is still present in a great many plays. In the simple provincial melodramas the hero usually goes out to it, and his reported (but not actual) death is exploited by the villain in regard to the heroine and so on, but the war is usually not essential to the story. Short spy plays with the scene in England are pretty frequent. And the repercussion of the war at home, socially and politically, is the theme of a few really good plays. Such plays are likely to increase in number after the war, with plays generally reflecting the deeper changes in the life of our community which will follow. It is in this direction, I think, rather than in plays of personal passion and problem, that the

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better intellect of the drama will exercise itself.

Meanwhile, for the moment, more plays or entertainments which divert attention from the war succeed than those which are concerned with it. One is taken from it, apart from its minor effects at home, in the lightest of them. The German Emperor is no longer so constant an object of gibes—and that is well, for he is a great criminal, or at the best the figure-head of a terrible wrong done to mankind, and it is disproportionate to make fun of him. These lighter shows, where the personality of the performers is many times as important as “the book,” are of course the most popular, for the bulk of playgoers are seeking the easiest relief from care and memories. But, as I have said before, the effect of the war on the young, while it has given them an added abandonment in their brief gaieties, has created and deepened gravity of thought and outlook underneath, and this is shown even in playgoing, here and there, though that is the last occasion where it is likely to appear. Some plays of serious import have had a vogue they could not have had a few years ago, and I believe the

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war, with its stir of feeling, is the cause. I have no doubt at all that this graver outlook will continue and show itself in the theatres as elsewhere.

XV

WAR AND SCIENCE

IT has been a commonplace on innumerable lips during the war that this or that invention was a grievous pity, having made war far more terrible than it was before. Less of a commonplace, perhaps, but still frequent, have been gloomy forecasts of what enormous horrors fresh inventions or development of existing inventions may bring in future wars. Some of us have wondered if science, the great glory and boast of civilization in the nineteenth century, will destroy it in the twentieth; will even destroy, save for barbarous and decivilized fragments here and there, humanity itself. It is the humble purpose of this article merely to expand these commonplaces of contemporary thought and to examine some of their implications.

An apology may be due to men of science for using the word in this connexion. One of them, a very able one, took me to task on the subject, pointing out that in the great

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march of scientific discovery such things as submarines and bombs were inconsiderable trifles, unimportant by-products, toys. No doubt that is so in the realm of scientific thought, if in the practical life of to-day these things are of terrible moment. It will not be denied, however, that, by-products though they be, they are a result of discoveries in chemistry and other sciences, and I think we may speak of "science" for short, if we remember that we are speaking of a fragment of it only—of significance only for such matters as life and death and human happiness and sorrow. My friend remarked also that it was unfair to blame inventors for the hideous results of their inventions: we should blame the anachronistic or wicked minds of the people who made the war, and so caused the inventions to be hideously applied. With that I agree. One may be tempted sometimes to applaud the procedure of remote ancestors who regarded an inventor as a wizard and burnt him, or to sympathize with the inhabitants of "Erewhon," who made the use of machinery penal. We may believe that the evil wrought so far only in this war by certain inventions by far out-

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weighs any good humanity may get of them for centuries to come. But that is not to blame chemists and engineers. Indeed, the facts are too serious for time to be wasted in blaming anybody, though in dealing with the facts, as humanity, to survive, will have to deal with them, it may be necessary to deal with persons or peoples. And first we must face the facts.

It is so obvious that recent inventions have vastly increased and extended the evils of war that it is superfluous to dwell upon the past. For the sake of completeness, however, we may pause to remember that part of the evils—and often the greater part—of wars in the past have not come from weapons at all, but from the greed and lust and cruelty of conquerors. In this war we have seen that when the conquerors, though happily for a brief time only and over but a small part of their objective, are Germans, these evils can be as vile and loathsome in our day as in any day of the past. In such matters, however, though we have to go a long way back to match the German record, humanity can only repeat its worst. In regard to inventions it is a question if any, with the excep-

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tion of the steam-engine, made war more terrible until the present day. Very likely it was quite as dreadful in the days of spears and bows and arrows as in those of gun-powder and bullets.

The steam-engine began one of the main and general lines, which are all obvious enough, on which science has made the horrors of war far greater and infinitely more extensive. It enabled much greater armies to be rapidly assembled and moved about than before, and the petrol-engine increased the facility until we see the present monstrous array of multitudes on the Western Front. There follows the terrific increase in deaths and wounds. Here, if there were any question of "blaming" science, as of course there is not, it would be fair to remember that so far as combatants in the field are concerned, if far greater numbers of them are killed and maimed, and if high explosives have intensified the strain of war—there was no shell-shock in the days of bows and arrows—science has also greatly comforted the lot of the individual soldier: he has not to endure the same privations or, save when the doctors cannot reach him, the

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same physical agony as his forerunners. But the evil wrought by swifter transit and its result in carnage goes beyond the combatants themselves and the sorrow of those to whom they are dear. It touches the future of countries which suffer in a few weeks of the fighting a greater destruction of their best manhood than in years of former wars.

The chief other main line of horror added to war by science is connected with submarines and aircraft. The former merely increase the range of destructiveness. There is no new moral element to them. Since men sailed the sea it was possible for murderous men to sink peaceful merchantmen and kill their crews and passengers. The new element in the use of submarines is a political one which concerns this country. The command of the sea by England is partially negatived by these craft, and in spite of it our own merchantmen and those of our friends are destroyed and their crews and passengers murdered by the German pirates. Science, in this case, has not worked impartially. Submarines apart, England's command of the sea was never so complete

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as now, and occasional mishaps to our ships at the hands of lawless men were otherwise always possible in former times. Here is no new devilry in kind, therefore, but only a difficulty for us. The range of the submarine must at least always be limited by the extent of the sea, and self-supplying countries, as in the main even England may be once more, have nothing to fear from it substantially, save in their military operations against countries oversea.

It is otherwise with the use of aircraft in war. This unfortunate invention—for unfortunate for humanity it has certainly been so far—has added a new devilry in kind, with a new moral implication. We speak of this or that belligerent in past times as having warred on women and children. But first they had to war on men. They had to storm a city before its women and children were at their mercy. That was a consequence of winning. Even in the case of a blockade, where direct pressure is brought on a whole country at once for want of food—quite a different thing from suddenly killing civilians, because a choice is left—mastery of the sea or the surrounding on land of a hostile city,

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as the case may be, is first necessary. But with aircraft a belligerent can begin his war on women and children simultaneously with that on men, and can continue it even while he is being beaten by the men opposed to him. It does not even require that he should have the mastery of the air. That was ours in a general way, and we were moreover beating them soundly on land, when the Germans made successful aeroplane raids on London. (It is true that they had first to conquer their bases in Belgium, but the lengthening of air voyages is so absolute a certainty in the near future that we may disregard that.) This possibility, of *beginning* a war by inflicting the same dreadful death, and maiming, on women and children as men suffer in the field, and of making that part of the essential scheme, does seem to me to debase war morally—that is, from the point of view of our Western civilization, with its traditions of chivalry and of sparing the helpless. To the Prussians, who never had those traditions, and to the other Germans, who have lost them, this no doubt would seem nonsense. If you can take the heart out of the enemy by blowing his children to

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bits, they would say, that is no more than blowing his men to bits, and no doubt they congratulate themselves on the foolish prejudices which have enabled them to get in this sort of blow first. And no doubt, either, if they find the blow effective, and are left in a condition to make another war, they will begin that war by its application.

As for the killing of male civilians, that does not of course shock our traditions in the same way. There is no moral degradation of war in killing us males at home. It is our misfortune, merely, not to be killed fighting. It is obvious, however, that since making war directly on civilians as a whole is a downward innovation on civilized practice, its possibility was an advantage to the more brutal and less scrupulous of the belligerents, and here again science has not been impartial in its effects. Of course the less brutal and more scrupulous belligerent has to follow suit. Air-raids which put a further strain on industry and tend to dislocate it are a weapon he cannot safely leave to his opponent, however much he may hate some of the consequences of his own resort to it. It is the case of poisonous gas over again, and

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this downward innovation also has to be practised by both sides. But meanwhile the brutes have gained, and Old England once more has suffered, both from her humanity and the diminution of her old island security.

It is no moral or comparative question, however, which is the important matter in this regard. It is the rapid and huge increase of suffering which the invention of flying machines will bring eventually into war. In a few years, for certain, on the declaration of a war, hideous death and maiming and destruction could be rained all over the belligerent countries. And if Mr. Wells's suggestion of some horrible improvement in the power of explosives were to come true, the destruction would be of the all-embracing and final kind depicted in his novel. So far as mankind is concerned, the result of scientific inventions would be much the same as the destruction of our earth by another heavenly body.

So much of present horrors and future possibilities : I have not professed to do more than expound the obvious. At this point, at the risk of annoying a scientific

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friend, I cannot help posing the question if certain inventions were worth while. The answer, I think, is obvious. They were not worth while in the present state of humanity. The dangers of evil use enormously outweighed their peaceful advantages. Men were better without flying machines until men could be trusted not to drop bombs. And that brings me to the lesson which everything enforces now, and which cannot be too often stated. It may be my necessary justification for so labouring a commonplace. Humanity is unfit for certain inventions while it contains people like the contemporary Germans. Not only the wickedness of such a war as this, but the appalling, intolerable stupidity of it was clear enough to others. Only the Germans, with their minds steeped and nursed in the old Prussian ideal of the State as an engine of plunder, only they thought fit to let loose this immeasurable evil on mankind, on the chance, since they thought it a good one, of material profit. It follows, therefore, that these inventions will continue to be a menace and horror to humanity until the Germans experience a true change of ideals. To that the dis-

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appointments and sufferings of this war may ultimately bring them. We can but hope, and meanwhile allow no weakness or weariness of ours prevent our utmost exertion, that their present ideals may be comparatively impotent for evil. But it is a terrible crisis upon humanity, this passage of time until the spirit is fit for the inventive mind. Meanwhile there is the one inevitable task : to beat down the Germans, as they now are, to harmlessness for evil.

XVI

THE WAR AND KENSINGTON GARDENS

THIS should be a sonnet, or a sonnet sequence, had I the skill, for so I might express, as in prose I cannot, what I feel about Kensington Gardens. There is no place, out of doors, that so catches my emotion, that holds so much for me of dreams and memories. There are more beautiful places, so vaunting travellers will hasten to tell me, smiling their cheap superiority on my Cockney life. But the beauty of Kensington Gardens, at once ordered and wistful, is perfect of its kind—is at least a sufficient background for the charm of long association. I have loved them since I was taken to play in them as a child, and for a treat was allowed to inspect the figures on the base of the Albert Memorial—which therefore I shall allow no one, under cover of talk about Philistinism and Victorianism, to destroy. In school and college days, it is true, and in

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the earlier part of my London life, the Gardens with their softer emotions attracted me infrequently, but for very many receding years now I have walked in them almost daily, mostly alone, sometimes with a pleasant companion, always with refreshment of spirit, with relief from bitterness, with a drawing of my thoughts to what is fair and happy. I have walked through the avenues of trees, rich in their summer wealth or bare (and as I think more beautiful) in their delicate tracery of winter; I have walked in the open green spaces in spring, and in autumn, when in the dusk the Serpentine is a fairy river, have stood on the bridge and gazed on misty palaces and towers, and have stood by the Round Pond where the boys—and men, many strangely old for the pastime—have sailed their boats, and have trudged home through Hyde Park to my dwelling reconciled with life. Sometimes I have mused on old associations, on Queen Caroline, that indomitable and humorous woman, who made the Serpentine as we know it and the Round Pond; on Dutch William, bringing his asthma or whatever it was that justly afflicted him to the Palace; on Thackeray,

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who built his house to harmonize with the neighbouring Palace just outside the Gardens. That reminds me of Sir James Barrie, about whom I am inclined to be a little sniffy as a late comer (compared with myself) but welcome as a true lover of the place and grudge not his Peter Pan's statue. Most often, however, I think of nothing so definite, but let my mind run in vague personal memories and let the beauty of the place comfort my soul.

It has comforted me, very needfully, since 1914. I remember vividly the first time I sat there, under the trees, looking down on the Serpentine, after the beginning of the war. I was confident we should win, and like many wiser people grossly underrated the task. But, as with many braver people, my mind was appalled, was numbed, by the illimitable probabilities of havoc and horror. With millions of men, armed with diabolic inventions, set to killing and destruction in Europe, it seemed that the world as we knew it must fall in ruin, though we ourselves stood upright at the end. Death and destruction were already working apace across the Channel. And with the imagina-

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tion of life, as we knew it, uprooted there was in my mind a bitter rage at the brutal stupidity of those accursed, atavistic German rulers who were to make life hideous for mankind. . . . It was a lovely August afternoon. I sat under the trees and looked about me and saw—what I had always seen on such a day. There were women knitting and women reading books; a few couples talking; children playing, dogs gambolling about, on the broad green space between the trees and the Serpentine. It all seemed to be unreal, the ghost of a world which surely must have vanished. Such a little way off, a few hours' journey, were death and havoc and horrible agonies, and here were Kensington Gardens and their familiar frequenters, serene, peaceful, apparently undisturbed, less disturbed than the feeding sheep, which the dogs now and then displaced.

Well, I know there are many people whom the sight of such a contrast exasperates; they complain in the newspapers. To me, I confess, it is a comfort. More, I see in it a symbol of strength, of resistance to panic, of effective protest against a horrible change. Anyhow to me personally it brings relief, a

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precious sense of escape for a while from dark preoccupations. And as the war has dragged on from year to year this sense of escape has become more and more precious, the assurance of some pleasant permanence in a changing world. Of course this sameness is partly an illusion, and the changing world is present in a few khaki figures or the blue of the wounded. People bring evening papers, as they were not wont, and if you catch a fragment of talk it probably is about the war. But so far as appearance goes it is mainly as I said. Comfortable old gentlemen and mature ladies are in a majority. They have come after tea from their comfortable Kensington houses and are going back to comfortable dinners therein. Bless them.

This of Kensington Gardens when one may sit there on a summer afternoon. Walking between the bare trees in winter one feels more keenly the pathos of the place. There is always that in beauty set in ugliness, and with the huge town pressing on its narrow boundaries this place was always pathetic. And now the pathos is a thousand times more insistent, for though not literally, yet

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in effect, this place stands for peacefulness and sanity surrounded by violence and unreason. That the violence and unreason are redeemed for the soul of men by the heroism and sacrifice of the brave men who are giving their lives in quelling them does not alter this pathos. Here is a fragment of the beauty and peace and sanity which the accursed Germans are destroying wherever they can reach. And the violence is not so very distant: one may go back from the sane and beautiful life of the trees to the monstrous silliness (in itself) of an air-raid.

But surely, pathetic or not, Kensington Gardens are permanent. They are virgin soil; there were trees and grass here since man lived on our island. They go back far in our history, with innumerable associations. Walking in them one feels that the best of our life and order, of which they are a symbol, must last. Yes:

“ . . . the last thing whelmed
In the ruining roar of Doom ”

will not be, as Henley said, the gallows. It will be Kensington Gardens.

XVII

THE LAST RESPONSE

EARLIER in the war I wrote about "the great response" which was made by my young fellow-countrymen to Lord Kitchener's call. And now, as a pendant to that, I would write about the response to the last call made upon us, that is to say, to the raising of the military age to fifty-one, and the further sending to the front of younger men now engaged in munitions, agriculture, mining and other vital interests with its consequent strain on our national life. I mean the last call so far, because though things go well as I write it is of ill omen to ignore the chance of more crushing burdens yet to be laid on us in staying the plague which the accursed German autocracy has brought upon mankind. The former picture was almost wholly bright. There were shadows in the background, but in the main there was a blaze of sacrifice, of high courage, of patriotism, and for the writer an almost

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undimmed enthusiasm. The present picture, rightly understood, should not be less heartening to ourselves, or less to our credit with posterity. But the shadows are deeper ; the colours are not the same ; it would be false to pretend there is the same glow on the canvas.

For consider the difference. The young men who came forward when Lord Kitchener first called upon them knew what hell they had to face, and knew it might be an even chance if they came back, but they were young and adventure appealed to them, and most of them had no responsibility for other lives. The sadness was in us who looked on ; they were light-hearted. With men approaching fifty the call means in many cases the final touch of ruin to settled lives, with wives and children left to penury. I mentioned to a friend concerned in ordering these matters the case of a shopman, one of whose two sons had been killed, and the other, shot through the lungs and invalided out of the army, was on his hands to be cared for ; his wife's health was precarious ; now he, too, was called up and had to give up his decent wages, and leave helpless wife and

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son to manage as they could. I said it was a sad case, and my friend replied : " They are nearly all sad cases." Then there is the uprooting of accustomed life, a different thing at fifty from what it is at twenty. A man who for twenty years or so has been master of his household, however small, does not easily bring himself to be disciplined in a crowd. It is true that these men will not be sent to fight, but truly to many this uprooting is worse than death. They have grown grey in civilization and they are to be plunged into barbarism, and the appeal of a new life, of adventure, is not for their age. Then again : the first rush of enthusiasm is over, we are holding on doggedly. In this condition, and for men of middle age, it is not so easy to dismiss doubts, as that if all things are managed wisely by authority, if men are used economically, if in fine they ought to have been needed, doubts they can hardly help reading in the papers, or to dismiss their resentment of younger men, not obviously more useful, being left, or of the young men in Ireland. The argument that because we once oppressed the Irish it is not incumbent on them though young and lusty

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to help us in preventing their being oppressed by the Germans is too fine for some middle-aged men who are not strong themselves and leave ailing wives at home.

For these reasons—and there are others—it is absurd to look for a joyous enthusiasm in these later recruits. The pictures—well meant, I dare say—in the comic papers of elderly men grinning with fatuous delight because at last they have “got into khaki” are not intelligent. It is indeed true that the chief horror of war is that it kills the young before the old ; but that is the nature of war and does not change the fact that it is harder for the old to leave responsibilities and settled life. But if we do not get what is absurd and impossible, we get what is truer and better. We get stoicism and a manly resignation to the inevitable. We get the admission that, whatever mistakes may have made their going necessary, as things are, their going is necessary, and so they go, not joyously but stoically. They see that one object transcends all others : the enemies of mankind must be crushed.

We can say the same thing, in a less degree, of that part of this last response

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which concerns the country as a whole in the further impoverishing of vital industries. At a time when we have to send more and more coal abroad we have taken this year tens of thousands of men out of the mines : I am told it is more difficult to make them stay in the mines than to take them. That means a winter of hardship for the whole country in a vital need of humanity. At a time when we are restricted in flour and the harvest is at hand we are taking tens of thousands from the fields. The country does not grumble. Here and there some one will say that there has been mismanagement, that these men should not have been needed. We others simply say that does not matter now ; we are told by the only possible authority that they are needed and they must go. Whatever happens the army must have its men.

In all this I find that which should hearten us, in its way, when we consider everything involved, as much as that first gallant response to the call for soldiers. The runner who starts most swiftly most commonly tires first. If, seeing the distance longer than he had thought, he falls into a pace which may

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be slower but can be kept up to the end, it is very well with him. Not to feel hardship, not to care what is done with one's life, is less than human. It is manly to feel it and endure for a good cause. I think our picture of stoicism may be a worthy pendant to the picture of enthusiasm we hung on our walls in 1914. And the stoicism, even more than the enthusiasm, will insist that there shall be no cheat in the reward for the sacrifice.

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